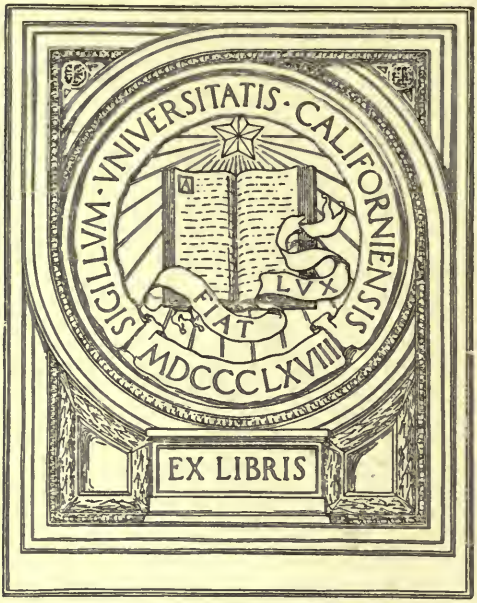
# WHEN LOVE FLIES OUT O' THE WINDOW

Leonard Merrick

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



Ruth B. Palmer

Middle Haddam
July 1920.

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*The Works of Leonard Merrick*

# WHEN LOVE FLIES OUT O' THE WINDOW

*The Works of*

## *LEONARD MERRICK*

CONRAD IN QUEST OF HIS YOUTH. With an Introduction by Sir J. M. Barrie.

WHEN LOVE FLIES OUT O' THE WINDOW. With an Introduction by Sir William Robertson Nicoll.

THE QUAINT COMPANIONS. With an Introduction by H. G. Wells.

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THE HOUSE OF LYNCH. With an Introduction by G. K. Chesterton.

WHILE PARIS LAUGHED: Being Pranks and Passions of the Poet Tricotrin.

NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

# WHEN LOVE FLIES OUT O' THE WINDOW

By LEONARD MERRICK

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
W. ROBERTSON NICOLL

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES
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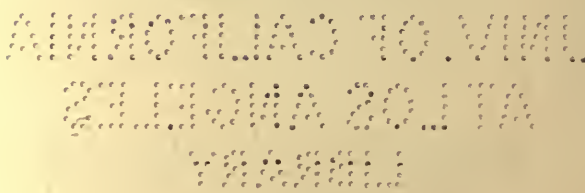

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# INTRODUCTION

## I

*When Love Flies out o' the Window* is one of Mr. Leonard Merrick's finest stories. This means that the book shows a singular mastery of the narrative style. Indeed as a narrator Mr. Merrick may well bear comparison with any of his contemporaries. He writes without effort or constraint; he wastes no words; he leads on to his conclusion without once turning aside. This means that he has thought out the sequence of his facts, and that he has planned the exits and the entrances of his characters. All the threads are in his hand, and he never allows one to slip. His conduct of the story is guided mainly by knowledge and partly by a rare and true instinct. He has a horror of excess in every form, and while he individualises sufficiently his men and women, he never attempts minute characterisation.

This separates him at once from authors who explain and digress. We used to have word painting in many novels—descriptions, often very eloquent, of the field or moor or sea-shore on



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which the action took place. We have now in many cases elaborate analysis of character. At the worst every remark and every action is explained or at least commented upon. In the hands of a master such work may be instructive, but it certainly retards the movement of the story. In Mr. Merrick's books the mind is not incessantly watched, and its experiences are not officially scheduled. We are told enough in a straightforward and simple way, and no more is attempted. We are not delayed by turgid descriptions of scenery or interminable explanation of motives and ideas. While dealing frankly with the facts of life, Mr. Merrick does not shamelessly rummage every hidden place of humanity. His reserve and self-command are everywhere noticeable.

## II

The greatest, the most moving, and the most arresting parts of his stories are those in which he brings his characters "face to face with the Red Sea." I am using a phrase of Mark Rutherford, who was constantly attracted by this situation. We come upon it often in Leonard Merrick and Mark Rutherford when what is best in their stories is disengaged from its casual environment. The predicament in "When Love Flies out o' the

Window" is that of Meenie in Paris. One day her salary is not forthcoming, and next day comes her bill. The bill is more than fourteen francs in excess of the sum due to her. She remembers how her father said "My life has been passed in hoping, and I have never reached one of the things I hoped for." When she asks for her salary she is told that she has to pay for her costume. She has no friend and no means of going away. Her need is desperate, and she is made to know the full measure of her employer's rascality. She is dizzy; she gropes in the dark on unfamiliar ground. Strain her eyes as she may, she cannot see a step ahead. In this book the deliverer appears when she is in the last extremity, and she is saved. The miracle happens; the waters are divided. Sometimes the miracle does not happen, and then the end is tragedy.

## III

Leonard Merrick has no theory to make good. He is not in any sense a didactic writer. He sees in life not so much retribution as catastrophe. He rarely praises or blames, and his characters often do base things, and often show a strength and purity which baffles every tempter. But they make themselves known by their words and deeds. He is really at home only in two worlds—the

world of the theatre and the world of literature and journalism. In these he moves with sure steps, but he is content to describe, and remains temperate and impartial in all circumstances. He is never stung into indignation nor does he indulge in useless complaints, but it is evident that to him the characteristic of both worlds is its extreme precariousness. Without meaning to do so he shows the importance of money as clearly as Balzac did. He is always thinking of the actress who cannot find an engagement, who has nobody in the world to help her, and who at most has but a few shillings in the world with no means of earning more—save one. The hope deferred, the fireless room, the meagre salary, the bleak reality, the sick fear, the creeping terror, the thoughts that make the heart quake—all these he describes as no one has described them. He has a place too for resilience and reaction after the very worst experiences. He knows also the difficulties of the author. The novelist whose reviews are excellent calls upon his publisher to ascertain how much money he is likely to receive, and learns to his dismay that the sale of the book has so disappointed the firm that they were out of pocket by the £100 which had been paid him on account. The journalist who thinks he has a safe two guineas a week for a Paris letter, and whose work

is at its best, is suddenly dismissed. He was to be supplanted by the proprietor's nephew for whom the proprietor's daughter felt a more than cousinly interest. "Of course Ralph did not hear that; he merely received a vague and courteous note." It comes as usual at the very worst moment. "The loss of two guineas a week could scarcely have been a greater shock to anybody. The bolt fell from the blue of August, and now the correspondent's capital was about thirty-five pounds. He had often had considerably less, and esteemed himself well provided for; but then he had been a bachelor." He knows to the quick what poverty may mean, and how it may divide two who are at heart loyal to one another. In *When Love Flies out o' the Window* the end is happy, but it is not the end. For Mr. Merrick life is always chequered, and the shadow follows the light. It is astonishing that a talent so fine and true and rare as that of Mr. Merrick has been so inadequately recognised in this country. Perhaps it is to be attributed to the fact that for some mysterious reason the public seem to care little for stories dealing with theatrical and journalistic life. I cannot at this moment recall one which has had a really popular success. But when Mr. Merrick is read it will be seen that he deals with the real stuff of life, that the experi-

ences he chronicles are experiences that in varying forms are to be found everywhere, and that he understands not merely the visible incidents and the conflict of man and fate, but the deeper springs of emotion. His splendid literary power cannot long be unknown to the world. He has already given us enduring gems of extreme finish, unique and perfected. And none is more precious than *When Love Flies out o' the Window.*

W. Robertson Nicoll.

# WHEN LOVE FLIES OUT O' THE WINDOW

## CHAPTER I

When the omnibus left the Royal Oak there were seven strangers in it; one of them was a girl. Because the sun was shining and she had risen with a little hope in her heart, she wondered where the six others were going, and what their stories were. In the morning, while she was jolted into town expectant, she often scanned the faces of the women opposite and tried to guess their lives; in the afternoon, when she returned despairing, she noted nothing but the superiority of their clothes.

Hers were eloquent. The hat suited her, but it was a white Leghorn, and the month was October; her gloves were carefully put on—too rare a virtue in woman—but they smelt of benzine; her cheap lace tie was fresh, but pinned to hide the shabbiness of her coat-front, and she had tucked most of her skirt out of sight.

She was a pale little girl, with fair hair, and eyes the colour of forget-me-nots. She looked as if she needed happiness, and three good meals every day. When she grew tired of conjecturing

the affairs of the glum-faced six, her mind reverted to her own, and then her lips tightened, and anxiety showed in her expression for all to read. The others in the bus read nothing, however, except the advertisements extolling cocoa and soap.

Her history was quite commonplace. She had a voice, and once singing-masters had taken guineas for training it, and a devoted father had foreseen a brilliant career for her. Not without a struggle had he resigned himself to the idea of her becoming celebrated, but he was a medical man with a moribund practice, and he said, "As Heaven has given Meenie a fortune in her throat, perhaps it would be wrong of me to stand in her way." When he had persuaded himself to accept this view, the singing-masters who accepted the guineas congratulated him on his wise decision. So Meenie studied harder than ever—to win the fortune. And meanwhile the practice died; and the summer after he had sacrificed his life-policy her father died too.

Then Meenie Weston took her voice into the marketplace, and the last death to embitter her youth was the death of her illusion. The little money in her possession melted rapidly. The prophecies of the professors ceased with the payment of the fees. She wrote letters to an eminent impresario, and received no answer from him. She

pleaded in person for concert engagements, eager very soon to earn a sovereign, and learnt that novices were expected to sing gratis for the advantage of being heard. She volunteered to sing gratis for the advantage of being heard, and was asked to take twenty pounds' worth of tickets—in other words, to pay the manager for putting her on his platform. When she explained that she could not afford it, the manager, who was renowned for the services that he had rendered to musical art in England, said that there were many young singers who could, and turned his back on her.

With such histories London teems, and many of them have their sequels in the chorus of musical comedies. It was into the chorus of musical comedies that she drifted at last, nodding her head, and clapping her hands, and tripping to right and left in a scantily dressed crowd for higher wages than she could earn by ruining her health behind a counter. And now, at twenty-two, she expected nothing better. As the omnibus rumbled up Edgware Road she was hoping for another chorus engagement as passionately as she had once hoped to be a prima-donna, for she had been trying to obtain one for a long while, and all that remained in her purse, after the con-

ductor collected fares, was sevenpence halfpenny and some pawn-tickets.

She drove as far as twopence entitled her to go and got out at the corner of Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street. It was her custom to walk from this point to the Strand, and to call at the offices of the dramatic agents in quest of an opening; but this morning she was not going direct to the Strand. For once her prospect was a shade brighter.

She made her way down Charing Cross Road into Shaftesbury Avenue. Here somebody called her by name, and, turning, she saw a girl who had been on tour with her in the spring.

"Oh, Miss Russell! how are you? Did I pass you?"

"How d'ye do, Miss Weston? Why, I thought you were in America, my dear!"

Among the ladies of the chorus "my dear" does not necessarily imply regard; they are "my dear" to one another the moment they are introduced: "Miss Fitz-Gerald, this is my friend Miss St. George!" Then Miss St. George and Miss Fitz-Gerald say at the same time: "Pleased to meet you, my dear!"

Meenie and her acquaintance shook hands outside a costumier's, and took stock of each other. Miss Russell put the stereotyped question—

"Well, what are you doing now? Where are you?"

Meenie made an unusual answer—

"I'm not doing anything—I can't find anything to do."

Such unprofessional candour surprised Miss Russell; she forgot to boast.

"I'm looking for a shop myself," she said. "How long have you been out?"

"Oh, I've had a long spell of it—months. I suppose you can't tell me of anything, can you?"

"Not me! All the companies are on the road at this time of year; there won't be a chance now till Christmas. Have you settled for panto?"

"Pantomime?" The girl who had dreamed of singing Isolde sighed. "I shan't be able to wait till pantomime. I shall be buried before the pantomimes are produced if something doesn't turn up first."

"That's rough," returned the other. "Things are bad with you, are they? Well, they aren't very gay with me, goodness knows! I was going to Russia for six weeks, but it fell through."

"I'm sorry," said Meenie. "You see, I've been ill," she added; "that is why I'm not in the American tour, and why I couldn't look for anything else till it was too late. I've sometimes wished I hadn't got well again."

"And what price this one? I've been out with *The Lady Barber's Oath* since I saw you, and the tour dried up, and they left us to pay our own fares back from Grimsby. How's that? Of course the kiddies are with mother, but I've got to send a P.O. every week, and——" She groaned, and put out her hand again. "Well, I wish you better luck, my dear! I must be off; I've got to get to Camberwell."

Meenie stood wrestling with a strong temptation to be mean. Then she said feebly—

"I'll tell you of the only opening I know: they're trying voices at the Piccadilly. I heard it at Potter's yesterday—I'm going there now."

"Well, I'm blest!" exclaimed Miss Russell; "you *are* a trump, and no mistake." She came near to blushing. "To tell you the truth," she owned, "that's where I'm going myself, and I didn't mean to lose a chance by giving you the hint. Ain't I a cat?"

"N—no," said Meenie—but the confession hurt her—"you aren't a cat; you're a soprano and so am I. Let us hope there will be room for both of us. *I* nearly held my tongue about it too."

They proceeded to the Piccadilly Theatre together, and entered the stage-door. The functions of a stage-doorkeeper, so far as they are to be ascertained by observation, consist of eating

his meals in a violent draught, and adding by every means in his power to the aspirant's difficulties. In the present case, however, the chorus ladies had no need to buy civility with a shilling, nor to wait while their names were taken in. The announcement that the agent had sent them down served as a passport, and they were admitted to the passage that led to the stage.

At the sight of it they glanced at each other in dismay. One would have imagined that half the chorus-girls in London were congregated here, and every one of them was holding a dilapidated copy of a ballad that had been her test song for years. A noticeable peculiarity of all the copies was the form in which they had been folded; chorus ladies always secrete their songs in their pockets on their way to have their voices tried, because every applicant for an engagement desires it to be believed that she is too well known for any trial to be necessary.

As the new-comers merged into the crowd, several threw them despondent greetings. After the sunshine outside it was dark in the theatre, for the only illumination came from the T-piece, and it was a few seconds before they began to distinguish the features of those who nodded to them. At a piano an elderly woman in a black dress was playing an accompaniment. In the

stalls a posse of important gentlemen, who were supposed to be listening, smoked cigars, and exchanged remarks in not very subdued tones. When the girl who was endeavouring to make herself heard had sung the first verse, one of them got up, and said brusquely:

"Thank you, my dear. You can leave your name and address. Next, please!"

"*She's* out of it!" remarked Miss Russell in a cheerful whisper, and the girl pocketed her tattered music with evident discomfiture. "You can leave your name and address" is the doom evasive.

Another girl was called down to the piano. She inquired, paling, if the lady in black knew "She Often Dreamed of Happier Days." The lady in black did not. It is characteristic of the chorus mistress never to know the accompaniment of the song that the applicant particularly wishes to sing. The girl began "Nobody's Darling but Mine" instead, and just as she was approaching her favourite note the stout gentleman who had spoken before stopped her with:

"Yes, my dear! Thank you."

At this the girl turned paler still, and retired in confusion. "Yes, my dear! Thank you" is the doom direct.

The crowd came down to the piano one by one.

Some left it jauntily, some withdrew abashed. After she had been standing about the stage for two hours, Meenie seized an opportunity to address the stout gentleman.

"Oh, please will you hear me?" she said. "Do hear me! Mr. Potter sent me down."

"What's your voice?" he asked.

"Soprano, Mr. Jenkinson."

"Soprano?" he said shrilly. "Good Lord, we're overdone with sopranos! No use, my dear. Very sorry, very sorry, but we only want contraltos now." He put up his arms and shouted, "No more sopranos wanted, ladies! Sopranos needn't wait!"

A loud chattering arose, and soprani—pretty, plain, tall, short, clumsy, graceful, dowdy, and smartly-dressed—flocked through the wings with resentful faces. Meenie stood where he had left her, swallowing a lump in her throat. She felt that her last chance had gone, and she was hopeless. After a moment she looked round for Miss Russell, but Miss Russell had gone too.

## CHAPTER II

It was one o'clock, so the little girl betook herself forlornly to a dairy, where a glass of milk and a scone served her for dinner. She would have preferred a bun, but a scone is more filling, and the same price.

She sat in the milk-shop wondering what she could find to pawn on the morrow. Her father's watch and chain, and the locket that had been her mother's were pawned already. Perhaps she could obtain a few shillings on a white silk frock that was a relic of the days when she used to go to parties. There was certainly nothing else. She decided to run out with it when she was sure that the landlady was in the basement. So far her landlady had not suspected the lodger's visits to the pawnbroker's, or she would have given her notice, forestalling a petition to wait for the rent.

When the scone was eaten and she had finished the milk, Meenie went out into the street again. There was nothing for her now but her daily routine, and she trudged to the Strand. She must go to Potter's. She wanted to tell him that she

couldn't get in at the Piccadilly and to implore him to find her something else. But Potter's was always besieged—Potter's this afternoon would be thronged—she would be amazingly lucky if she contrived to speak to him.

The location of Mr. Potter's dramatic agency was as well known to theatrical folk as the whereabouts of Trafalgar Square; his name and the description of his business in the doorway were merely a concession to custom—a faded superfluity. As Meenie neared the end of her walk an experienced eye showed her several strangers bound for Potter's: she could tell their calling by their carriage and their costumes; and the neighbourhood that they were in left little doubt as to their destination.

She mounted a stone staircase as high as she could go, and then paused patiently. Over the heads of the actors and actresses avid of engagements she could read a printed notice to the effect that ladies and gentlemen were requested not to block the landing. Nobody else appeared to have noticed it, however. On the stage of the Piccadilly Theatre the crowd had been composed solely of choristers; here on the staircase of the agent, chorus-girls rubbed elbows with the heroines of melodramas—lovers, villains, ingénues, and Irish comedians were thrown together indis-

criminately. Provincial actresses compared notes of their successes—on both sides edited for publication. Men attired in their best suits boasted to women having every natural—and many an unnatural—shade of hair. In the hum of voices such falsehoods as "Seven pounds a week, my dear, but that wasn't good enough for *me*" could be caught continually. When a glimpse was obtainable, through the mob, of the earlier arrivals who had secured seats in the waiting-room, girls could be seen devouring sandwiches—clients who had come resigned to spend the day here and carried their luncheons, with their powder-puffs, in their vanity-bags.

The waiting-room, when she reached it at last, contained many accustomed figures. There were the girls who were able to keep up appearances and call in different hats each time; her own hat was always the same. There were girls who, like herself, came every day and had learnt one another's clothes by heart. Every day they sat here—and always with a fainter hope; every day they went away desponding—each to the trouble that the others didn't know.

She stood by the mantelpiece and stared at the great photographs of triumphant women that decorated the walls. How she had grown to hate them! The smiling favourites of the West End

seemed to mock her. Sometimes she could have dashed her fist against the glass that preserved a picture, as she waited, hour after hour with aching feet, under a portrait that simpered, ceaselessly simpered, in her face.

A superior person who drew a salary every week in the year rattled without respite on her typewriter. Meenie contemplated her jealously. A youth of important bearing sat at a table making entries in an account-book. He also had regular employment, and she envied him as well. The door of the private office opened, and Mr. Potter came out and crossed briskly to his partner's. The sensation was intense. A dozen men and women sprang towards him clamouring; in pitiable eagerness one girl caught at his coat-tails.

"Can't see any of you now," he said—and vanished. A Brobdingnagian sigh seemed to be heaved in the room. Meenie dropped back to the fireplace drearily. For a minute nobody spoke. The relentless racket of the typewriter was the only sound.

"You look tired, my dear. Sit down here, if you like—I can squeeze up."

She turned her head and saw that the speaker was a young woman whom she had not noticed before.

"Thanks," she murmured, "I should be very glad to."

"It's tiring work!"

"Very," she said. "How long have you been here?"

"Four hours. And I don't want an engagement—I'm only waiting to tell him that I can't take one."

"You're lucky!"

"Well, I suppose I am. You see, I've half settled with him to join *The Best of All Girls,* and this morning I got a much better offer on my own. That's just how things happen, isn't it? I came here as early as I could—I must tell him how I stand at once."

"In *The Best of All Girls?*" said Meenie. "Is it for chorus? If you don't want it, there might be a chance for *me*—I am trying for a chorus shop." Her vocabulary included a few of the slang terms of her profession by this time. She had acquired them inevitably, although she had begun by shuddering at them.

"Oh no, my dear," answered the other, "it isn't for chorus; it's a part. It wouldn't suit you a bit, I'm sure. They want a big girl with a figure like mine—somebody who can talk to the band."

The sense of the last words was lost on Meenie, though she was not sufficiently interested to ask

what they meant. They referred to one of the alleged humours of musical comedy. It is, in these productions, occasionally the duty of the orchestra to pretend to confuse a vocalist by the iteration of a bar that sounds like oom-tarara. The young lady stops them, saying, "Thank you; I've had quite enough of *your* impudence!" Then, in a tone of portentous warning, she adds, "'Tiddley push!" And the audience yells. The expression was esoteric; the girl showed that her education had not extended so far as that.

"You're new to the business, aren't you?" said the woman. "What have you done?"

"I've been on tour—only the chorus. That's all I'm looking for now; I don't expect to get anything better—I'm not good enough."

"Oh, never say die! You've got a good appearance anyhow, and that's half the battle. Why don't you take a few lessons? Haven't you got any people who can afford to pay for some for you?"

"My people did pay for some," said Meenie in low tones. "They are dead."

There was a little pause. The typewriter clattered furiously, and a girl with a voice of brass could be heard saying, "She can call herself 'Principal Boy' till she's blue, but I'm engaged to play

Dandini! Which part gets the most money in *Cinderella?"*

"It's a bad job when you've got no luck, and no oof, and you're all alone," continued the woman. "Are *you* all alone? Lor! I know what it is, my dear—no need to tell *me*—you can jolly well starve between the shops!" She hesitated for a second. "Do you think you could take anything better than chorus if you got the chance?" she inquired.

"Why?" said Meenie, with a little stirring at the heart. "Do you mean that I might do for *The Best of All Girls,* after all?"

"No; I tell you you aren't tall enough for that. But they're making engagements for the show that *I* want to join. If I'd heard you, I'd speak for you to-morrow. Anyhow, there's a tip for you, if you like to try."

"Like to try?" Meenie smiled. "I'm ever so glad to hear of it! What company is it? What's the part?"

"It isn't a part; it's a concert engagement for Paris. They want two or three people to sing in English. It's only a small hall—I daresay you'd be quite strong enough. I was at the agent's this morning, so I know they aren't complete yet. If Potter hasn't got anything for you, I'd go round the first thing in the morning, if I were you."

"I'll go now," exclaimed Meenie, rising; "they may have settled with everybody by to-morrow! Where's the office? Is it near?"

"Yes, only a minute. Look here; I won't wait any longer myself. We'll go together, and I'll send Potter a wire. I do hope something will come of it. You looked such a heap of misery when you were standing there—that was how I came to speak to you."

"I felt miserable, I can tell you! . . . I don't know your name. Mine is Meenie Weston."

"Mine's Nelly Joyce. Now don't blame me if it's a frost—it all depends what your voice is like. Come on!"

Meenie nodded, and hurried down the stairs much more cheerfully than she had ascended them. In Bedford Street the lights of the Bodega were inviting, and Miss Joyce proposed that they should "drink luck" to the undertaking and have "a glass of port wine." The girl had been in the chorus too long to be startled by the suggestion, and though she was fearful of losing the prospective salary by delay, she recognised the worldly wisdom of the advice.

"Why, you little white thing," said her companion, "you look a sight too much as if you wanted a shop. That isn't the way to get one. A glass of wine will buck you up and your voice

will sound twice as well. What are you going to sing?"

"I've got a song in my pocket," said Meenie. "I was trying to get in at the Piccadilly before I went to Potter's."

They sat against two barrels, labelled "Pale Dry" and "Rich Old." The port, and the faint, lurking odour of the place, soothed her nerves; the flower-pots in pink paper, and the blonde head of the barmaid behind the ferns had a festive air. The atmosphere was scarcely less theatrical than that of the office they had left. Actors lounged and chatted all round the bar; and some ladies and gentlemen of the chorus, who came in, helped themselves plentifully to biscuits and cheese, and departed without spending a copper, their manœuvres unnoticed in the crowd.

The agency, as Miss Joyce had said, was close by. It was smaller than Potter's—one of the struggling ventures that are constantly springing up in the streets off the Strand, generally to enjoy a short term of life. "The Continental Operatic and Dramatic Agency" was painted in white letters on a black board, between a hairdresser's and a florist's, and on the first floor the name met the girl's eyes again.

The outer office here was bare; the photographs displayed were chiefly faded cabinets, and

the walls were adorned merely by a few playbills. At Miss Joyce's request, a boy went to ascertain if Mr. Hughes was disengaged, and after about ten minutes the pair were admitted to a cosily furnished room, containing the inevitable piano, and more likenesses of young ladies in tights.

The agent cultivated a certain professional air himself, although he made his living by the performances of others. His fat face was clean-shaven, and the profuse black hair that he had grown was combed off his forehead without any parting. When they entered, he was at a writing-table littered with letters and the evening papers. Meenie thought he looked in a very bad temper. He did not ask them to sit down, but inquired curtly of Miss Joyce what she wanted, cutting her polite greeting short.

"I advised my friend to come and see you about the concert engagements," she answered. "She would like to go too, if there's anything open."

"I think we're full up," he said. "What about yourself—are you free or not? I must know for certain to-morrow morning."

"I'll let you know by eleven o'clock, Mr. Hughes."

He turned to Meenie, surveying her from her forehead to her feet.

"What experience have you had?"

"I have been in Mr. Blandford's companies on tour," she replied. "He was going to send me to America with *The Fair Fakir,* but I fell ill and couldn't go."

"What parts?"

"Only chorus. But will you hear me? I have a song with me."

"Go on, then," he said; and she went to the piano, and began her own accompaniment.

She sang the song known in England under the title of "As Once in May." Her voice was sweet, and she sang with feeling. "In death's dark valley this is Holy Day." The agent blew his cigar smoke among the photographs musingly; the gloom on his face lightened a little, and he did not interrupt her. When she finished, Miss Joyce threw her an encouraging nod.

"All right," he said. "It's a three months' engagement; the terms are fifty francs a week. Will that suit you? I can't do any better."

"Yes," she answered, trembling with joy, "that will do. You pay the fare both ways, of course?"

"Yes, we pay fares. Are you free to go to-morrow?"

"I could go to-morrow, certainly. But——" She hesitated. "You see, I've been out a long time, and——"

"You can have a pound on account of the first

week's salary—that will cover your exes, and carry you on." He made some insertions in a contract, and when she had signed it he gave her a sovereign. "Be at Victoria at half-past eight tomorrow evening, outside the telegraph-office. I'll meet you with your ticket. That's all, my dear. Good-afternoon."

He jerked his head towards them both, and the interview was concluded.

"Well, you're in luck!" exclaimed Miss Joyce, as they went down; "that was soon managed, wasn't it? You've a nice little voice of your own, too, my dear! I knew he would settle with you as soon as you opened your mouth."

Meenie regarded her gratefully; they sauntered on a few yards together in the dusk.

"I can't tell you how much obliged to you I am," she said, squeezing her arm. "I do hope you will get out of the *Best of All* tour, then we can go together. Which way are you going now? *I'm* going up Endell Street; I take a bus from Tottenham Court Road."

This, however, was not the other's route, and when she had declined an invitation to tea they separated. In the last half-hour the whole aspect of the city had changed to the girl, and London hummed gaily in her ears. To the thousands who gain a hand-to-mouth existence by the stage an

engagement for three months brings a sense of security which nobody used to regular employment can comprehend. Her troubles had already faded in her mind. She neither looked back, nor strove to see further ahead. The contract was all-sufficing. A struggling governess whom she passed felt a pang of bitterness as the little girl who smiled so happily hurried by; yet even the wretched governess, had she known her circumstances, would have shuddered in contemplating so precarious a mode of life.

When Meenie had parted from her, Miss Joyce retraced her steps and entered the private office of the agent again—this time with less ceremony.

"Well," she said, "what do you think of her, eh?"

"She's pretty," said the man. "Where did you pick her up? There won't be many more to be got, I can tell you—the damn Press is publishing a warning! Girls are 'earnestly warned' not to sign engagements for the Continent without writing to the British Consul first. There you are!" He caught up *The Star,* and dabbed his finger on a paragraph, 'Dangers to English girls on the Continent!' And it's in *The Westminster* and *The Globe,* and half-a-dozen of 'em. It'll be all over the Strand by to-morrow!"

She leant on the table and read the lines that he pointed out to her.

"That's the straight tip, isn't it?" she murmured. "But, lor, how many of the girls it's written for ever see a newspaper?"

"One tells another, Nell; it gets about."

"There'll always be plenty who are too hard up to be careful," she said. "You've got this one anyhow! And she has no people and no friends, so there'll be nobody to make a fuss."

## CHAPTER III

THE young woman was not mistaken in her views. When she declared that few of those to whom it was directed would profit by the caution, she was familiar with her subject; she understood that the Press was endeavouring to instil prudence into a class whose stupidity, coupled with their circumstances, made protection a difficult matter. Not only would many of them learn nothing by the warning—they were ignorant what a British Consul was. They had never heard of a British Consul. For all they knew, "The British Consul" might be the name of a public-house. She spoke out of the depths of experience, for she had been in the rank and file of the theatres herself, and even now she seldom read anything but the advertisement sheets of *The Era,* and novelettes.

That the tale she had told Meenie was quite false need hardly be said—she had neither an offer from *The Best of All Girls* company, nor any intention of proceeding to Paris. Having cast in her lot with Mr. Hughes, she had tem-

porarily retired from the stage and served him by touting for a business which had every prospect of being exposed in the police-court. More businesses in London than millions of Londoners suspect are touted for by women. Money-lenders frequently find them useful, though they require them to be better dressed and better looking than Nelly Joyce.

Meenie, when she could afford to buy one, did read a paper; it was a habit of her non-professional days that she retained. In the life of every girl fighting to support herself, however, there not unnaturally come times when the affairs of the world possess as little interest for her as the affairs of the struggling girl possess for the world. The problem that engrosses her is how to keep out of the workhouse. The death of a monarch or the defeat of a nation is trivial. The crisis is the landlady's bill.

As her excitement subsided a little, Meenie was stirred by a sudden anxiety about her toilette. She had not thought of it immediately, because she was accustomed to have her costumes provided by the management; now it occurred to her with dismay that in a concert-engagement she would be expected to find her own dress.

The only evening frock that she could boast was the one of doubtful white silk that she had

proposed to pawn. When she reached her lodging, she took it out of her box and examined it ruefully. She determined to smarten it as well as she could with some fresh ribbon and a few yards of lace.

Next morning, directly she had had some tea and bread-and-butter, she went to Westbourne Grove to get them. When the frock was finished, she looked through her music, and decided what songs she would sing. Then she packed everything—it did not take long—and had dinner. Brave with the consciousness of money in her pocket, she had ordered a chop.

When she arrived at Victoria, neither Miss Joyce nor Mr. Hughes was there, and she waited by the telegraph-office impatiently. The agent appeared at twenty minutes to nine, and gave her a few directions. Replying to her, he said that Miss Joyce had found it impossible to cancel the engagement that she had made for the provinces. He had brought the ticket, and lest the girl's views had altered and she should try to sell it, he waited to see her depart.

"You had better drive straight to this address for your rooms," he said, producing a card on which he had written. "The girls always stay there. It's very comfortable and near the hall."

"Will the people be up when I get in? What time shall I be in Paris?"

"A quarter past seven. If you have a cup of coffee at the station, you won't be at the house much before eight. You can get French money on the platform at Newhaven if you want to. Oh, you had better change to second class on the boat—here's the difference. So long! You're off!"

He favoured her with another jerk of the head and lounged away, and she put the card and the silver in her purse.

The journey was a cold one, but the novelty of it kept her amused at first. She had never had dealings at a money-exchange; and though she accepted the few strange coins with misgiving, to hold them gave her a sensation of adventure. She had never crossed the Channel; and to make one of the chilly crowd that filed over the gangway into the dipping boat seemed more adventurous still. Even the discomfort of the passage did not dispirit her much. She lay among the huddled women, of whom the majority were ill, rejoicing that she was not seasick too. The motion of the boat was unpleasant, and she could not sleep, but though she shivered from time to time, she was not actually dreary until Dieppe was reached.

She was just losing consciousness when the

voices and the bustle apprised her that they were there. She clambered down, blinking at the lights, and joined the posse that pressed forward on the deck. The knowledge that this was France, which she had always been eager to see, could not prevent her teeth chattering in the customhouse. The buffet lured her to its warmth, but it was besieged; the waiter was too busy to observe her nervous signals, and she lacked the courage to be peremptory in a foreign language. Dieppe was black as they steamed slowly beside its shuttered cafés; she yawned at it dismally. When she reopened her eyes she was at Rouen.

Twenty minutes past five. She stretched herself a little. The lamps of the bookstall blazed brilliantly; the yellow covers of the novels, and the illustrated papers had an air of gaiety at twenty minutes past five. How funny to find a bookstall open at this time! French shouts on the platform; the train puffed on; her fellow-passengers disposed themselves anew for slumber. She stared through the window while the landscape lightened. Sombre trees against a pallid sky; a river—could it be the Seine?—silver in the dawn; the flare of a forge. The engine panted peacefully. . . . Where were they? Everybody was standing up and collecting bundles and

bags. Oh! she had been asleep again—it was Paris.

She could say, "Pass the salt, if you please," in French, and "It is the book of my brother," but when she wished to be attended to, she could utter only the word *bagage,* which she had heard constantly shouted on the quay. Fortunately in France they recognise that interpreters are desirable at great termini. While continually testifying to the English being "so practical," they show themselves, in not a few respects, more practical than we. Her perplexity was not prolonged.

She was guided to the refreshment room.

After she had drunk the anticipated cup of coffee, which was a great surprise to her—for that all coffee in France is perfect is one of the articles of faith of everybody who hasn't been there—she followed her trunk to a cab. The extent and aspect of the station astonished her; she had never before seen one that was not depressing. Outside, she showed the card that Mr. Hughes had given her to a porter; and when she had presented him with two coppers she was rattled away.

It was a fine morning, and the pulses of the little bohemian throbbed joyously. As the yokel on the box invited destruction, she could have sung aloud. The smiling streets, the uniforms of the policemen, and a postman's, the sight of the

names over the shops, and the advertisements on the kiosks delighted her. Presently the pace slackened; after a few minutes the cab stopped. She waited to ascertain if there was any intention of going on again, and got out.

The street here smiled less serenely; the high houses were a shade sinister. She embraced as much as possible of the neighborhood in a glance, and pulled the bell of the door which the driver indicated with his whip. The bells that she had known in England pealed; the French bell emitted a single deep note, and perhaps its performance did more to make her feel abroad than anything that had happened yet. Overhead she saw the words *Chambres Garnies* painted in dull red capitals. She hoped *garnies* meant "cheap."

The woman who confronted her the next moment might have been credited with having run down from her bed but for the fact that she had appeared too quickly. She looked as all Parisiennes of the lower middle-class look until one o'clock in the afternoon: her striped dressing-gown was soiled, her hair was tousled, and her face was unwashed.

"Madame Montjou?" said Meenie. "I have just arrived. I was recommended here for rooms."

The woman wheezed.

"I was recommended here for rooms. *J'étais recomm*——" She took Mr. Hughes' card out again. "I want *chambres*."

At this the woman, who was evidently troubled with asthma, became as voluble as her complaint would allow. Her fluency was restrained by nothing but her gasps, and it began to seem as if she would never leave off talking. The unintelligible sentences were interlarded with questions, and when she found they were not understood, she had recourse to gesture. The girl nodded in a helpless fashion. Then, resorting to pantomime herself, she held out her money and pointed to the cabman.

"I have come from the Gare St. Lazare," she said.

"Gare St. Lazare," repeated the proprietress; "oui, oui, oui—trois francs."

She picked them from the girl's palm and shuffled to the kerb, and Meenie could only suspect that the man did not get them all.

As the cab had been discharged, she assumed that she was going to live here; and the supposition was strengthened by the woman beckoning to her to go upstairs.

Her conductress wheezed shockingly as they mounted to the first floor. There she turned a

handle, and with a flourish displayed a florid bedroom.

"How much?" asked Meenie. *"Combien est-il?"*

The woman opened and shut both hands four times.

"Francs?" screamed Meenie. "Do you mean forty francs *une semaine?*" She made violent signs of rejection.

"Tenez!" said the woman.

They ascended to the floor above, the woman gripping her chest. The room shown on this story was a faded edition of the one below.

*"Combien est-il?"* asked Meenie again.

The wrinkled hands opened and shut until they signified twenty-five francs. The girl shook her head vehemently.

"Tenez!" said the woman.

They toiled to the third—and to the fourth floor. The woman's breath was now whistling like a high wind, and Meenie counted the movements of the dirty hands, palpitating with suspense. On the fourth floor it was possible to acquire a room at a weekly rental of twelve francs. She agreed to it by a nod, and intimated that she would like some breakfast.

"Tenez!" said the woman, and shuffled out.

## CHAPTER IV

She returned presently with a jug of chocolate and some rolls. The tray was a marked improvement on the breakfast trays at Bayswater, and the girl's enjoyment of the meal was only damped by her doubt of what it was to cost. Out of the prepaid half of her first week's salary merely a few coppers remained. She reflected in munching, that she must be very economical. The day was Wednesday, and there would be difficulties on the Wednesday following if her food-bill for the interval exceeded thirteen francs.

After she had rung for some soap, and waited an hour or more for her brush and comb, the woman's husband brought up the box. He said—

"Monsieur ees 'ere; 'e shall mount?"

"Who is here?" she asked, relieved to find that somebody had risen now who was partially intelligible.

"Monsieur Le Beau—from ze 'All; 'e desire to see mad'moiselle."

"Oh!" she exclaimed; "I'll go down to him."

In the passage she saw the landlady, and gath-

ered from her thumb that she would find the visitor in the dining-room. The dining-room was meagrely furnished. The visitor was rotund, and middle-aged. His puffy cheeks were colourless, and his eyelids hung so low that the eyes themselves were scarcely visible. At the corners of his upper lip a few blonde hairs were waxed into upward spikes.

"You are mademoiselle Meenie Veston?" he inquired.

She said she was. "I came by last night's boat."

"Monsieur 'Ughes 'as writ me. We make a re*har*sal for you at eleven o'clock. You speak French, mees?"

"No," she said, "I'm sorry to say I don't."

"Ah, you learn very soon; before you return, you speak it just as good as I speak Eengleesh. You 'ave nevare before been in Paris?"

"No, this is the first time."

"Ah, you will like it much. You come now, zen—zat will be best. You soon be ready? I show ze vay?"

No other manager had ever called on her, and his presence inspired her with an agreeable flutter of importance. She ran upstairs and unpacked her portfolio, and put on her hat and jacket, realising the emotions of a prima-donna

with an impresario trembling at her frown.

"You 'ave brought photographies?" he asked, as they made their way up the street; "nice photographies of you in costume? I 'ang zem in ze 'All."

"It is very good of you," she replied; "but I haven't any photographs; I wish I had!"

He rolled his head reprovingly.

"Vot songs you 'ave?" he asked. "Nice songs?"

"Oh, I have plenty of songs here—all kinds. I can sing whatever you like."

"Bien. I shall see; I shall 'ear zem at ze re*har*sal."

She was not long in discovering that he had an affection for the last word; it contained the only aspirate that he seemed to have mastered, and he was evidently vain of it. During their short walk along the boulevard, monsieur Le Beau referred several times to the re*har*sal, and always pronounced it as boastfully as if it had been the name of a distinguished son.

Most people who have stayed in Paris know that there exists there a peculiar and unpleasant tavern, bathed in blue light, where the customers are received by persons habited to resemble celestial beings. It is called "le Cabaret du Ciel." There exists also an equally peculiar, though less offensive, establishment where the lights blaze

red, and the attendants, attired as devils, greet the visitor with the assurance that Satan is waiting for him. This is called "le Cabaret de l'Enfer." One day it occurred to a man who passed that it would be a bright idea to intersert a concert-room, which should be called "le Cabaret de l'Homme" because it stood between "Heaven" and "Hell."

The scheme was impracticable, but the name lingered in his mind. "Cabaret de l'Homme" was inscribed on the façade before which monsieur Le Beau stopped. The girl, who had been realising the sensations of a prima-donna, stared at it blankly. A shop window had been quickly coated with red paint, and to the centre pane a strip of paper was fastened, headed *Ce Soir*. Beneath was a list of the singers' names, apparently scrawled with a small brush dipped in ink. She saw that the upper half of the primitive advertisement was devoted to herself, and lest she should overlook it, monsieur Le Beau pointed it out to her.

"You understand?" he said, translating:

"'ZIS EVENING
MAD'MOISELLE MEENIE VESTON
EENGLEESH ARTISTE
FOR ZE FIRST TIME IN FRANCE.'"

She nodded, trying to conceal her disappointment, and he opened the door.

It was dark inside. The room was low, and the paint on the window kept the light out. Momentarily she did not see much; she was conscious only of the atmosphere, rank with the stale fumes of cigarettes. As her sight adapted itself to the obscurity, she saw that cigarette-ends were everywhere; they littered the floor, and lay soaked in the beer-stained glasses which a sleepy-eyed waiter was collecting from the little tables.

"You allow smoking here?" she faltered.

"But certainly; in France always! Ça ne fait rien. You sing just as good. Vait a beet!"

He disappeared and left her to swallow her mortification. For an instant she wished with all her heart that she were back in London, critical as her situation there had been. Even when she had told herself that any engagement was better than none, her dejection refused to yield to the argument.

She sat on a frowsy velvet lounge against the wall, noting the sordidness of the scene—the semicircular bar, the disordered chairs by which the tables were meant to be surrounded, the small platform supporting a piano. So this was the concert-hall. Miss Joyce had not lost much! As yet her reflections went no further than that; it

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did not occur to her all at once that Mr. Hughes had deliberately misled her.

In a few minutes a swarthy woman with an enormous bust advanced. Meenie got up, and the woman said:

"Eh bien, ma chère, 'ow you are? My 'usband tell me you speak no French? Sit down, ma chère. 'E go to find ze pianist. You are tired after your travel?"

"No, I'm not very tired," said Meenie; "I've been resting at the lodgings." There was a pause, and since the manageress was so cordial, she thought she might as well seek advice. "Perhaps you could tell me what I ought to pay for meals there?" she went on. "I can't go out—I mean I am bound to have them all in the apartments—and I shall only have twenty-five francs next Wednesday to settle everything."

"Appartement?" said madame Le Beau; "you 'ave an appartement, ma chère?"

"A room—a bedroom; Mr. Hughes recommended the place to me. The rent is moderate enough; but I have so little to manage with the first week."

"'Ow much she charge you?" asked the woman.

"Twelve francs. Of course this is nothing to

do with you; I oughtn't to talk to you about it, but——"

"Ça ne fait rien," said the other, shrugging her shoulders; "I understand. Do not unquiet yourself! She know me very vell; if she not trust you, you say to 'er she is to come to me—I tell 'er it ees all right. And she ees very good—you not find in ze quartier an 'ouse more sheep as her. Ah, oui, oui, oui"—she flapped her fingers soothingly—"do not unquiet yourself! Listen, ma chère; your costume ees in ze dressing-room. Ven you 'ave sung you put it on—you see if it fit you nice."

"'Costume'?" Meenie looked at her with big eyes. "Do I sing in costume—there on that platform? I have my own dress."

"Eh bien, if you prefer it, ma chère—ça ne fait rien! Vot ees it, your dress?"

The girl explained breathlessly. She had not been in the chorus long enough to wear burlesque attire on the stage without embarrassment, and the thought of donning it for a room terrified her.

"Oh, but no!" exclaimed the manageress when she understood; "it must be costume—zat ees obligatoire. But it ees not shocking—you will see, ma chère. You will like it much."

Monsieur Le Beau returned now, with a bent

old man who crept to the piano. And during the next hour Meenie sang selections from her repertory, while the waiter rinsed the glasses in a pail.

It proved an irksome task. She learnt that her introductory song, and her last must be lively, and the husband and wife shook their heads again and again. Their names were Isidore and Marie she soon discovered; and after each refrain the man grimaced at Marie, or Marie pursed her thick lips at Isidore. Then they cried shrilly together, "Plus gaie! Plus gaie!" and the man added, "Ze programme ees très important—it ees for zat raison ve make a re*har*sal."

The pianist addressed her only once; he spoke in French, and she could not understand what he said. He accompanied so well that it startled her to see his face; what was left of his mind seemed far away. She wondered of what he was thinking while he played. The stare in his sunken eyes made her fancy that he looked through the music and the cabaret into a time when he too had known his hopes. "Plus gaie! Plus gaie!" came the cry; his expression never changed. Automatically he turned the next sheet that she passed to him—like an automaton the wasted fingers worked the gayer tune; and so he sat there, a human wreck recalling God knows what.

"As Once in May" had been accepted for her second turn without discussion, but when *The Fair Fakir* had contributed her third, there was still the question what she should sing first. Eventually she bethought herself of a ditty called "The Mermaid and the Tar," and she was thankful as she sang it to see monsieur Le Beau's bald crown swaying complacently to the air.

When she stopped, he signified his approval of this, and it was settled that she should make her bow to the Cabaret de l'Homme with "The Mermaid and the Tar." The manageress patted her on the arm:

"Sharming, ma chère! Les étudiants—ze Eengleesh and ze Americans—will be much pleased. Mon Dieu, zey will be épatés! Elle est piquante, n'est-ce pas, Isidore? Come now, ma chère, and I show you ze pretty costume."

She led Meenie to a dressing-room not much larger than a cupboard, and little more luxurious. A narrow shelf was strewn with some old copies of *Gil Blas,* and on these the costume was exposed to view. The girl took it, and turned pale. Her tongue stuck to the roof of her mouth for a moment, but she faced the woman steadily:

"I can't wear that, madame Le Beau," she said.

*"Comment?"* exclaimed the woman with a start.

"I can't wear it; I wouldn't put it on."

Madame Le Beau could storm in spite of her suave tone—the capability was advertised on her face—and Meenie waited for a tempest now. To her surprise the cloud passed; the frown that had caught the heavy brows relaxed.

"You not like it? You find it not modeste? Verra vell, ma chère. All right—you shall 'ave anozzer."

The answer was so unexpected that the girl strove to palliate her refusal.

"You see what it is," she said deprecatingly; "I couldn't really!"

"No, no, no, ma deere—vot you please! If you not like it, ve go to ze costumier—you shall shoose for yourself. You 'ave time, ees it not? Ve go togezzer to la rue de Provence."

Not many a manageress would have been equally submissive, even in the circumstances; and Meenie's gratitude was tempered by the fear that the man's deportment would surprise her less. When they rejoined him, however, and he heard where they were going, he did not appear to demur. With a little natural vanity she began to feel that her abilities had rendered them eager to conciliate her. Her eyes brightened, and for a minute her mean surroundings brightened also.

Outside, in the sunshine madame Le Beau

looked commoner still, she thought. Indeed the gross Frenchwoman and the pale-faced girl, whose wondering glances proclaimed her a stranger, made as ill-assorted a pair as the city could show, as they descended from Montmartre. More than once a head was turned cynically to gaze after them; a lounger at one of the cafés they passed smiled to his companion with an expressive shrug.

In the rue de Provence, at a wardrobe-dealer's, where madame Le Beau was evidently on intimate terms, they examined the stock. Afraid of pressing her objections too far, Meenie was at last forced to declare herself content with a burlesque costume of pale blue satin. The material was creased, and the trimmings were tarnished, but she saw that the skirt would reach her knees, and that its trail of pink roses could be utilised to heighten the corsage. How much was paid she did not hear.

The parcel was awkward to carry, and she was glad when she arrived at madame Montjou's door. There the manageress parted from her, reminding her to be at the cabaret at nine o'clock. Montjou, who admitted her, inquired if she would like déjeuner. Though déjeuner signified "breakfast" to her mind, she was too hungry to argue about a name. She said "We, we!" and at

a table spread with a dirty check cloth where she perceived that some other lodgers had already lunched, she was served with soup and stew.

Upstairs the parcel was untied, and she put the costume on. She found that she must alter it; so she unlocked her trunk again, and felt for the old night-light box that held her needles and cotton. Fantastically attired, and with an intense expression, she twisted herself before the mirror, considering her mode of attack. She frowned deeply, and seemed to perpend the fate of empires. Presently the crisis passed and her brow cleared; she had resolved to take in the bodice an inch each side and to put two pleats behind in the band of the skirt.

After the alterations had been successfully accomplished, she took out the white shoes and stockings that she had meant to wear with her own frock. She had nothing further to do except to wrap the things up. Therefore she lay down on the bed to think.

She was roused by her landlord's voice informing her that dinner was ready, and awoke to a dark room. She learnt to her surprise that it was past six. Her appetite at present made no demand on her purse, but as a meal might be unattainable later, she supposed she would be wise here to eat when she was bidden.

Two melancholy gas-jets were now lighted above the dirty cloth, and she found that she was to dine in company. At the table sat four women in dressing-gowns; another—a pock-pitted blonde, with her hair in curling-pins—had huddled on an ulster, loosely buttoned and exposing a bare breast. The study afforded by these five glutting women, with their sluggish gaze, their flaccid mouths, and the red and check wrappers, was one of abandoned brutalism. It was difficult to realise that they had thoughts, or vanity—that they were human; it was appallingly difficult to feel that their sins had any psychological importance. Among themselves there was no disguise; their natures were unfettered with their forms. Pretences were for the platforms where they sang; their provocations would be put on with the paint. Here the squalor was undissembled—and one saw the depths.

The dressing-jacket of the chorus-girl, in which she loves to loll in her lodging till theatre-time, was a familiar sight to Meenie; the spectacle presented by this salle-à-manger was new and horrifying, and she registered a vow to escape from madame Montjou's as quickly as she could.

She escaped from the salle-à-manger after ten minutes, and mounted the black staircase again. The bedroom was cold and dreary, though to

brighten it as much as possible she lighted both the candles. She intended to leave for the cabaret early, lest she should mistake the route, but it would have been useless to start so soon, and the time seemed very long to her. By turns she sat watching the waver of the candles in the draught, and walked to and fro between the bed and the washhand-stand to keep herself warm. Through the panes of the high window the rattle of Paris stirred her with the knowledge of where she was, and she recalled with a shiver the days of her ambition, when she had pictured herself arriving in Paris. She had always succeeded before she came here in her dreams. The attic was to have been luxury at the Grand Hotel; and a brougham should have been outside to drive her to the Opera House. She remembered that once she had even thrilled with excitement in imagining hardships as an artist. The hope deferred, the fireless room, the meagre salary—they had their fascination in biographies; a few chapters more, and one could be confident of salvos of applause! Who would fail to be brave for half a volume? Yes, in her girlhood even the prevision of a scene like this—the mere knowledge that she had the right to call herself a Professional—would have warmed her blood. How bleak the reality was! She looked inward and tried to re-

capture the lost emotions; but it was quite in vain.

By-and-by a clock struck eight, and she made ready to depart. The parcel under her arm, she left the house, and turned towards the lamps that lit the boulevard. A few yards past the corner she recognised the name over a café, and hurried on, guided by the landmarks that she had noted in the morning, until the door of the cabaret was reached.

## CHAPTER V

A GLIMPSE of the serried audience—the jingle of glasses, and the roar of a refrain. She passed hastily to the dressing-room. In the dressing-room she was alone. Through the partition everything could still be heard distinctly—the song, and the piano, then the hubbub and the battering of hands.

The floor was bare excepting for a ragged doormat; the single chair had a torn seat. She had often been nervous, but never till now had she known the nausea of nervousness. The absence of a dresser added to her distress, and the hooks and eyes in her shaking fingers evaded one another so persistently that she was afraid she would not be ready in time.

At last, when the costume was fastened, she sank onto the torn seat again, and waited, according to orders, till she was called. Since she entered, three vocalists had been announced, and nobody had disturbed her; she wondered what had become of them, and concluded that there must be a second dressing-room that she had not seen.

Smitten by the sick fear that she would forget the words she had to sing, she sat reciting them under her breath. With clasped hands, and her lips moving mutely, she seemed to be in prayer.

Now another turn finished. The babel broke out once more, and she listened dizzily to catch what followed. Monsieur Le Beau's voice rose out of the din: "Mesdames et messieurs, j'ai l'honneur de vous annoncer que mad'moiselle Meenie Veston——"

The name struck a blow on her heart, and the rest was lost. She sprang up and moved with tremulous knees towards the door. It had already opened; she saw beyond it through a mist.

The cabaret was a blur of faces. As the shrunken pianist rattled the introductory bars, she dropped her gaze to the platform to steady herself. Since there were no footlights, she had neither darkened her eyelashes, nor rouged her cheeks; her pallor and the timidity of her pose made her an unusual figure. The note came, and she began:—

"A sailor went to Kiralfy's fair,
And fell in love with a side-show there:
A mermaid flaunting her amber hair—
She was labelled an 'Illusion.'
Her lips were ripe, and her glance was gay—
He longed to kneel at her feet all day;

But mermaids come, as I needn't say,
To a different conclusion.

Entirely false conclusion!
To see it turned him pale;
He marked with agitation
The lady's termination,
Oh the painful termination of the Tail!"

There was a general murmur and some tepid encouragement, though few there understood what she was singing about. Her self-command was creeping back to her, and the scene had grown clearer; through the smoke that curled to her nostrils and her mouth she could distinguish features now. Suddenly, with a little gasp, she perceived why none of the women had returned to the dressing-room; she saw them, tinselled and wheedling, among the crowd, drinking at the tables. The note came:

"Before her tank, with enamoured sighs,
The tar looked long in the mermaid's eyes;
Her feeling first was a cold surprise,
Then mer-maidenly confusion.
She learnt to find his devotion dear,
And ev'ry day he would reappear;
He felt he'd part with a hemisphere
For to wed that fair 'Illusion.'

That golden-haired 'Illusion'!
She filled his honest life;

Old joys were dust and ashes,
He shunned his former mashes,
And he pined to win the mermaid for his wife."

She observed one of the men put his arm round a singer's neck. The woman took a whiff of his cigarette, and leered. In the alcove of bottles, the manageress was regarding them impassively. A terror that had no affinity to stage-fright gripped the girl, and the room swam in hot haze. She resolved not to stop here; she would demand to be released! Almost at the same instant she recollected that she would forfeit the homeward fare, and asked herself, dismayed, *how* she could return. But she wouldn't stop; no, whatever happened, she wouldn't stop! The note came:

"Then once she crept to his startled view;
She'd shed her tail—and her tresses too.
Her hair was false, but her heart was true,
And anticipation thrilled her.
O fatal day! but he called her 'plain,'
And never came to the tank again.
She watched for seventeen years in vain—
Then her wounded feelings killed her.

That poor 'Illusion's' fate, Love,
A warning should extend:
When Man's infatuated,
To keep him fascinated—
Why, remain a Fair Illusion to the end!"

The plaudits had an ironic sound to her ears as she left the platform and hurried to the privacy of the dressing-room. The thought of completing her programme appalled her, and in a frightened way she considered the practicability of repudiating her agreement at once. She suspected Mr. Hughes' good faith now, and nursed her courage to declare that she had been induced to sign the contract by false pretences. If the fare to England were unobtainable in the circumstances——? Always at this point her cogitations stumbled lamely. If the fare were unobtainable, what should she do?

> "'A fair old frisky,
> Put-away-the-whisky,
> Good old time we had!'"

Another English turn was in progress. After what she had seen, she understood that solitude would not be permitted her for long, yet it was with a shock that she heard the handle jerked. Madame Le Beau's bulk filled the doorway. With her evening black, and her watch-chain, and the little sticky curls flattened on her temples, she had acquired a more masterful air. Even her bosom seemed to domineer now and bulged authoritatively.

"Vot for you stay 'ere?" she said, as Meenie

rose. "It ees ze 'abit of ze artistes to seet at ze tables, and to collect money in ze shells. You find it also more gay. Go in, ma chère!"

"I want to speak to you, madame Le Beau," said Meenie.

"You speak presently; now you go in! And you make yourself agreeable, and you say you 'ave thirst—you find always someone to pay. It ees necessary 'ere, because we charge nozzing for ze admission, zat ze people drink plenty, you understand? Ze more you drink, ze better I like your voice. And you can 'ave, 'unger. Make 'aste!"

"I must speak now. I want you to release me, please; I'm not willing to fulfill the engagement."

"*Comment?* You are not 'veeling'?" The amazement was a trifle overdone; she folded her arms with a large gesture. "Vot you mean?"

"I didn't know what kind of engagement it was. Mr. Hughes never told me—he told me it was for concerts. I don't know whether he deceived me on purpose or not, but I hadn't the least idea what I was coming to. I've never been in a place like this; I couldn't stay in it—you must let me go."

" 'Oo you zink you talk to?" cried the woman angrily. "A place like zis? What 'ave you to say about ze place? It ees a respectable place,

ees it not? You 'ave sign an agreement, ees it not? You do your business and 'old your tongue, or you get in trouble."

"I ask you to let me off," muttered Meenie.

"You zink you take my money for nozzing, yes? You must be a fool!"

"I will send you the money as soon as I earn it—I swear I will! You must know that I oughtn't to have come, you must see that there has been a mistake! Oh, madame Le Beau, you won't be so wicked as to keep me here?"

"Assez, assez, assez!" She pointed peremptorily to the door. "You are the girl who always refuses, hein? Zis morning you refuse ze costume, zis evening you refuse to remain. Listen!" Her voice rose violently. "You are ze servant 'ere. You understand? You 'ave sign an agreement, and you do what you are told, or I show you ze law. You go in, and you seet at a table, and when ze gentlemen speak to you, you say, 'Payez-moi un bock, yes?' And you drink it quick! Vite, vous filez!"

"I won't!" said Meenie, trembling. "You may make me sing, but you can't make me do that. I won't go in till it's time for my next song."

There was a sickening instant in which she thought she was going to receive a blow, but the fat arm fell again. For a few seconds the woman

stood lowering at her. Then, with a shrug, she said:

"Alors, you sing! And you make no more disturbance, because you 'ave no right; you 'ave nozzing to say. You understand, mademoiselle Veston? You have nozzing to say. I 'ave ze law; eef you disobey me, you shall be punish. Bah!" She snapped her fingers in the girl's face, and left her to realise the position.

The girl's first step towards doing so was to burst into tears. Being a sensible girl, though she was an inexperienced one, she dried them very soon, and decided to take the only course that was open to her now—she decided to break her contract as soon as she had the means to reach London.

She knew the sum that was required; her ticket had cost eighteen shillings and sevenpence, and she determined that the surplus from her second week's salary should amount to as much as that if she had to live on milk and rolls in the meanwhile. She must resign herself to remaining for a fortnight. She formed her plans deliberately. Next Wednesday, when madame Montjou presented the bill, she would give her a week's notice. It would not be wise to tell her that she was leaving Paris; she would say merely that she was leaving the house. Then, on the evening that she

was paid fifty francs, she would walk out of the cabaret for the last time. When her desertion was discovered she would be in England.

It was quite simple. The only blots that she could see on the scheme were the enforced delay, and the parsimony that she must practise in order to save the money. The latter defect she faced cheerfully, and the former she told herself she must bear as best she could. At all events, since she had gained her point and was to be allowed the privilege of withdrawing between her turns, the worst feature of the engagement was averted. She recovered her composure in view of this definite prospect of escape; and when she was recalled to the platform she entered more firmly.

She was greeted by a buzz and prolonged stares. She had sung too ill to attribute them to pleasurable anticipation, and she understood that her retirement had been noticed and commented on. At the end of "As Once in May," however, there was spontaneous applause, and a knot of men, wearing strange hats and masses of unkempt hair, demanded its repetition. Their cry was taken up, and the manager, lifting his heavy eyelids to her, nodded his head.

So by command of the crowd she sang "As Once in May" again, and now she rendered it as

well as she was able. She was not a great singer, but her voice was the purest, and by far the best-trained, that had ever been heard between the smutched walls. This time she forgot that the words and her costume were incongruous—she imagined the spirit welcoming the bereft at the grave. The absinthiated mind of the dreamer at the piano awoke and responded to the rare call of an impassioned voice, and he, too, did his best; he, too, saw a grave—where lay all the ambition, and the opportunities, and the worthiness that he had lost.

She was a success. Madame Le Beau herself regarded her with less disfavour as she passed. And when she came back for the song from *The Fair Fakir* she had the salutation of a favourite.

It was nearly one o'clock when she was ready to leave, and she feared that, in spite of her little triumph, she would now be intimidated by the woman and her husband together. To her relief, they watched her go by without hindering her; the man even favoured her with a listless wave of the hand. Somebody among a group of loungers on the pavement addressed her as she went out, and followed for a few yards, she thought. That was nothing; that was only as if she had been leaving a stage-door again in England. When she had toiled up the stairs and

turned the key, the room on the fourth floor looked a haven of rest to her. But she reproached herself for selfishness in wishing that she had Miss Joyce's companionship and counsel.

## CHAPTER VI

FAITHFUL to her project, she commenced next day a regimen which permitted no misgivings. In London she could have ventured upon considerably better fare with the means at her disposal, but in Paris, and in new lodgings, she did not know to what extent she might be cheated. She decided, therefore, to allow a wide margin for dishonesty and to reduce her meals to the slenderest proportions.

The afternoon was fine, and she was tempted to explore Paris, which was an unwise proceeding, because it gave her an appetite. Her wanderings, however, brought her to the Grand Boulevard and the place de la Concorde, and this, her real introduction to Paris, so enraptured her that she promised herself a similar excursion daily. The cabaret held no developments. Madame Le Beau eyed her glumly, and the manager, fingering his tiny moustache, accorded her a slow, surreptitious smile. As before, she sang, and saw, and wished herself away; as before, she reached home tired and disgusted. "Two evenings over!" she murmured, as she got into bed.

In any other circumstances than those which were responsible for her resolve she would have reflected that it was better to bear the ills she had than fly to those which awaited her return. As it was, she could not hesitate. On any night the exemption granted her might be rescinded; sooner or later, her common sense told her, it was sure to be. She recalled with increased astonishment madame Le Beau's compliance in the matter of the costume. It was extraordinary that she had been so meek, the woman who had been so brutal a few hours later! Perhaps she had been drinking in the interval and grown morose? But the question was insoluble, and the girl abandoned it.

On Friday she discovered the Garden of the Tuileries, and sauntered there till dusk began to gather. When she made her way back, the lamps were shining, and the allurements of the restaurants stabbed her with familiar pangs. She was pursuing a line of action which few men would have had the fortitude to sustain, for it entailed inconveniences that she had overlooked—one of them keener to her than semi-starvation: it necessitated her exposing herself to the curiosity and contempt of the asthmatic crone and Montjou. Many people starve in Paris, as elsewhere; but here was an eccentric—an Englishwoman with a

salary and credit, who was too mean to eat meat! Ten francs in her pocket would have spared her this indignity; she could have appeased her hunger outside. Moneyless, she was forced to exhibit her economy and to endure their astonishment.

An additional embarrassment lay in the fact that the man's acquaintance with English had proved to be hardly more extensive than her own knowledge of French. She could neither offer an excuse for not descending to the dining-room, nor order what she wished upstairs. Sometimes, indeed, since he had found that the table-d'hôte was not to profit by her presence, she thought that he affected to understand even less English than he could.

She was living principally upon eggs and soup, lunching and dining in view of the red-draped bed which was never made until she had gone to the cabaret. Her avoidance of the salle-à-manger kept her aloof from the women whom she had shuddered at on her first evening, but observation from the platform had shown her two of them among her fellow-singers. She wondered if it was one of these who bawled the English words that she could hear from the dressing-room.

As she was passing to it after her second song on Friday night, a man plucked at her skirt,

holding up a glass, and saying something at which his neighbours burst out laughing. She saw that the two women seemed to enjoy her discomfiture more than anybody else, and they continued to laugh shrilly after she had drawn herself free. In about half an hour one of them joined her. It was the first time that any of the "artists" had entered the dressing-room while she was there.

The woman dusted her face with a powder-puff before the cracked looking-glass under the gas-burner; and having cast one or two sidelong glances at the girl, said thickly:

" 'Ow is it you ain't with your mother at Buckingham Palace, my dear—won't she 'ave you?" She was the blonde, who had worn the ulster and the curling-pins. Under her make-up the pock-marks were scarcely visible.

"What?" said Meenie.

" 'Ow's the rest of the Royal Family? Did you leave 'em in good 'ealth? I feel proud to powder my nose in your 'Ighness's company. I hope your 'Ighness don't object?"

To this delicate badinage the girl returned no answer; and the woman, crossing her hands over her breast, and casting down her eyes, simpered:

"Don't look at me—I'm that shy!" The next moment she abandoned derision for abuse with

savage swiftness. " 'Oo are *you?*" she demanded. "You're putting on a good deal o' side, ain't *you?* 'Oo are you, sitting in here by yourself as if you was a star? Gordstrewth! You're too big a swell to obey rules, I suppose? 'Oo are *you,* to do as you like, eh?"

"I'm not doing as I like," said Meenie, "or I shouldn't be here listening to you."

"What's good enough for one is good enough for all, ain't it? Why should Madame favour you? Airs and graces make me sick, d'jear? There's no side about *me.* Don't think I envy you, sticking in this hole by yourself—you must be a precious fool. What gives me the needle is differences being made. Differences make me sick, d'jear? Fair's fair."

"I was told to sit in there, and I refused to do it. Unless I'm dragged in, I *won't* do it!"

"Refused to do it?" echoed the woman. "Refused Madam? Did you, though?" The statement appeared to mollify her. "Well, you've got a bit of pluck, for all you look so soft! I like *you.* It isn't often I tike a fancy to a girl, but I like *you.* And ain't we both English, among this beastly lot o' French frogs?" She was suddenly affectionate. "The minute I clapped eyes on you I knew we was going to be pals. 'Ere! you keep it up, my dear, and don't let 'er bully

you. She'll try. Oh, I know 'er—she'll try. And she's up to all manner o' dodges for driving the girls in. *I* don't interfere—what's it to do with me?—but I like *you*. *I* never said a word to 'urt your feelings, did I, my dear, whatever the others may 'ave done? A lot o' toads! Have another drink, old dear!"

Meenie got up, and moved about the little room restlessly, longing for her to go; but so far from taking the hint, she took the vacant chair.

"Ain't we both English, me and you?" she repeated. "And that's what I says when they run you down. 'She's English, like me,' I says, 'and no one says a word against 'er in *my* 'earing. Britons never shall be slives,' I says, 'Madam or no Madam!' It's more'n three years since *I* saw the good old Strand, old dear; Lord knows 'ow long it'll be before I see it again! Lord knows! I often think of it, I can tell you—these 'ere bocks ain't worth drinking. London's my 'ome —I was brought up in London. I was. I ain't kidding you—I was brought up in London; mother 'ad a 'ouse in Stamford Street. And a good mother, too—nobody says a word against mother in my 'earing—a good, open-'earted woman. If it hadn't ha' been for the booze, she'd never 'ave got in trouble, and I wouldn't have took to the stige. Ah, life's a 'ell of a job—a 'ell

of a job! . . . Don't mind me, old dear—I've got the 'ump to-night; meeting a friend—English, like me—it upsets me, and everything's so sad!" She rested her head on the shelf, and wept.

Presently she roused herself with a start, and after a hasty application of the powder-puff, returned to her duties. Meenie was disturbed no more. These incidents were the only new features of Friday night. Before she fell asleep, she said, "Three evenings over!" and thanked God.

On Sunday morning she went to Service at Notre Dame, arriving there by means of a succession of humiliating little duologues which she strove vainly to curtail.

"Pardon! Où est Notre Dame, s'il vous plait?"

"Comment?"

"Notre Dame?"

"Comment?"

"Notre Dame?"

"Ah—h! *Notre Dame!*"

On Sunday evening she sang as usual at the cabaret. Monday was a red-letter day to her, for it marked another week—the following night her salary would be due. Her routine was nearly always the same. The late breakfast, the basin of soup, and then the ramble about the city, to linger on the bridges, wondering at the brightness

of the Seine, to lose herself in strange byways, and emerge into new scenes of splendour. She stood on the steps of the Opera House and marvelled at the audacity of her girlish hopes; she stumbled on unexpected market-places, where Paris burst suddenly into flower; she was fascinated by the dignity of surprising stalls where old volumes in their thousands aired their decrepitude in the sunshine of the quay.

Her salary was not forthcoming on Tuesday night; but with Wednesday came her bill. She opened it confidently—it was to be the certificate of perseverance, her reward for many sternly repressed temptations. When she had deciphered the total, her first idea was that she must be making a mistake. She scrutinised the figures again. Was is possible—it couldn't be possible —that they meant thirty-nine francs, and something over? The warmth began to leave her cheeks, and she could feel her heart beating.

It was no use deceiving herself. Her bill was more than fourteen francs in excess of the sum due to her. But how could it be? She puzzled over the items; the smallest was a word beginning with an "S." That cost a franc. At last she made the word out to be "savon"—she knew that "savon" meant "soap." Soap, tenpence! Why strain her eyes over the hieroglyphics any

more? After "Soap, tenpence," anything was possible—even candles costing a half-crown!

She lay back on the pillow faintly. Then, in spite of all her self-denial, there wouldn't be sufficient surplus from her salary next week to take her home! Sufficient? She realised an instant later that there wouldn't be any. Assuming that the next week's bill was the same as this one, she would still be in her landlady's debt. Her plan was crushed!

She felt too sick to attempt a remonstrance with the brute downstairs yet; she was glad to remind herself that it was no use trying to say anything until madame Le Beau had paid her. Besides, how could she talk to him? No, she must submit to the inevitable! All at once the prospect of escape from the Cabaret de l'Homme was vague.

But thrift had been easier to practise than was philosophy. The check was bitter. She questioned, bewildered, how much these people would have had the brazenness to charge her if she had indulged in ordinary fare. The Grand Hotel would have been cheaper then, perhaps? Or perhaps they would have boarded her for no more than they had charged her now? The last reflection shook her painfully; it might be that she could have had enough to eat for the same money!

When she rose she saw that the day was wet. By-and-by the man Montjou brought in her soup; he put down the tray with the indefinable insolence of manner which she always strove to persuade herself existed only in her fancy. When she had lunched she sat at the window, gazing at the blur of rain till egg-time.

The hours were very dreary; her experience of loneliness in lodgings held no more dismal picture. With the extinction of courage her outlook had been plunged in gloom, and she was a prey to the mood in which one questions what justification one has for hoping for anything. Hope? Her father had been hopeful almost to the last! The practice had declined and died while he hoped; hope deluded him until all chance of finding a purchaser or a partner had been lost. She remembered that in a rare burst of bitterness he had once said to her, "My life has been passed in hoping, and I've never reached one of the things I hoped for. Hope is incipient hallucination—in the next stage one believes oneself to be Isaac Newton, or Julius Cæsar, and has to be put under restraint."

For herself, what? When she entered on her first engagement she had still expected to attain something better. Not Isolde—she had been awakened from that dream—but light parts of

distinction. Now it seemed to her that a voice was the last qualification necessary on the musical comedy stage. She had been in the chorus with women who could not sing a note; she had met women who had left the Academy or the Guildhall to conquer London—and they, too, were in the chorus, their medals preserved, but their confidence long lost. With interest to provide her with a chance, she would have emerged from the ruck and made some little reputation, she thought; without it she would belong to this heterogeneous crowd for life. A unit among the ambitious and the apathetic, the gifted and the incompetent, the refined and the vulgar, the virtuous and the immoral—the chorus—that was her lot! Never to scramble any higher; to count herself blessed when a tour lasted four months; to be like a girl she had known in the Stratford pantomime, who lived at Camberwell, and reached Liverpool Street every night after the last bus had gone. It was a long walk—she got home about half-past two. And three mornings in the week she had to be back in time for the matinée. During the evening performance she could scarcely bear the pressure of her spangled shoes, and used to peel them off after the processions and cry. Her name was forgotten. What did it matter?—Legion!

At nine o'clock the cabaret once more. The scowl of the sensual woman; the leer of the sensual man. The "artists"—how did they find that word?—in their tawdry satins; the unintelligible shouts, the rattle of the glasses, and the hot, dense fumes of tobacco. All this through hopeless eyes, all this while her mind reiterated that her plan was spoilt.

Her salary was not sent in to her. Before she left, she lingered at the bar and asked for it. The cabaret was nearly empty; Isidore and Marie bent their heads together at the till.

"Could you let me have my salary?" she murmured.

Le Beau flicked the ash from his cigarette and lounged away. The woman stared at her silently.

She repeated: "My salary—the twenty-five francs?"

"Your salary? Vot you mean? I do not understand."

"You don't understand?"

"But no; 'ow your salary? I pay for ze costume a 'undred and fifty francs. Enfin, when you 'ave earnt so much, you ask for salary."

"You're going to charge me for the costume?" stammered Meenie.

"Vot you zink, you zink I buy it you for love? Allez-vous-en; I am busy!"

"Madame Le Beau, I must have my money! I've my bill to pay; I haven't a penny, I can't go on without money. I've never had to pay for a costume in any engagement I've been in; it isn't usual—the thing is unheard of!"

Madame Le Beau lifted her fat shoulders almost to her ears.

"It eez ze rule 'ere. Eef a girl ees not content to wear ze costume I offer, alors, she pay for anozzer! She ees a fool, but zat ees all."

"I see," said Meenie slowly, "I see now." Her desperation drove her to a last appeal. "Then draw a little off the salary each week. If you stop the whole of it I shall starve."

"Zat ees not my affair. I owe you nozzing—*you* owe to *me!* And you need not starve. . . . I 'ave told you 'ow to get supper at ze tables, but you would not. Aha! . . . zink it over, ma chère: you see I 'ave advise you for ze best."

She nodded triumphantly, and turned her back. After a moment the girl passed out.

## CHAPTER VII

Well? . . . What was going to happen? She was liable to be turned out of her lodging at a moment's notice. She entered the house quaking with the thought that a settlement might be demanded of her in the passage. This did not occur, however; nobody saw her come in. She had been furnished with a key by now, and she stole up the stairs on tiptoe.

What was going to happen? She sat asking herself the question in a kind of stupor. She asked herself why she should continue to endure the cabaret, since she was to receive no payment; but the answer was that madame Le Beau could summon her if she didn't. How long would these people wait? At the most another week, she supposed? And then? She would have no money then—it would be three weeks before she had any! What was to become of her when their patience was exhausted? She must move, and live on credit again. But would they let her take her trunk? . . .

If she gave the Le Beau couple cause for sum-

moning her, her dilemma would be revealed to a magistrate; it would be the best thing she could do! But their action was indefensible—they would be afraid to summon her. . . . Then she need not go back to the cabaret, after all? Ah, but if she defied them, they would inform madame Montjou, and madame Montjou would turn her adrift at once! To retain the engagement was the only way to retain a shelter.

Two of the women had slammed their doors already. By-and-by the stairs creaked again, and she knew that another had come home. There was seldom much sleep to be had between the hours of one and three, and she was often disturbed by the sound of voices that she did not hear during the day; but to-night the house was quieter than usual. The steps drew near and paused. Her heart, heavy with the thought of her bill, sank suddenly, and she wished that she had blown out the candles. There was a knock, and the handle was jerked.

"Who's that?" she exclaimed.

"Me! It's all right," said a voice she remembered. "Let me come in."

"What do you want? I'm in bed." This wasn't true.

"I want to speak to you; I saw the light, so I knew you was awake."

"Come in the morning—I'm very tired."

"Come on, don't be a fool—open the door! I want to speak to you."

She crossed the room irresolutely, and unlocked the door and put her head out.

"It's all right," repeated the pock-pitted blonde; "I'm not drunk. I thought I'd give you a look up. I was there when you was talking to Madam. She wouldn't part, would she?"

"No," said Meenie."

"I knew she wouldn't—I could 'ave told you that before." She came in uninvited and sat down. "The stairs 'ave winded me," she murmured. "But I thought I've give you a look up. You've got the 'ump, eh? Wish you was dead? I suppose you think it's got nothing to do with me, one way or the other, but I felt sorry for you—that's all about it. It's no kid; I mean it! I talked a lot o' rot the other night—I'd had a tiddley or two—but I'm sober now, and if I could 'elp—*h*elp you, I would. That's square talk, ain't it? You can believe it or not, but it's square. Look 'ere, if you've got a friend in London, you write to 'im! Tell 'im he must get you out of this, if 'e pawns his ticker. . . . That's square too, ain't it? You may do as you like, but you can't sye it ain't square."

"I haven't a friend," said Meenie. "I'm sure

you mean well. I'd get out of it to-morrow if I could, but I can't. I don't know what I'm going to do. I can't go away, and I can't pay my bill."

"Why, of course you can't pye your bill," said the visitor; "that's 'ow they manage it. A girl 'oo can't pye 'er bill can't hold out, you see, old dear. And a nice bill it is, I'll bet. 'Ow much?"

"Thirty-nine francs—and I've been stinting myself all the week so as to save enough to get back with!"

"I began to guess that, when you never came down. First, when I 'eard your voice, I thought you'd got special terms—that was what put my monkey up—but I soon found out. Lor, I've seen 'em before you—seen 'em in 'Avre—*H*avre —lots of 'em! There was one poor girl—well, never mind that! Madam works the racket with these 'ere Montjous; they pile up the bill, and she fines the girl and stops her salary. And what's a poor devil to do then? That's the long and the short of it, my dear. You wouldn't wear the costume she showed you—I know all about it now; that costume trick's as old as the three-card fike. If you'd worn the costume, she'd 'ave stopped your money because you wouldn't obey rules. You can be precious sure she'd 'ave stopped it somehow."

"But does she pay nobody—doesn't she pay *you?*"

"Ah, me?" returned the other. "Oh, y-e-s. . . . But you see I'm one of them as didn't mind the rules, old dear. They made no odds to *me.*"

There was a short silence. She found a cigarette in her pocket, and lit it in the candle-flame, and sat puffing vigorously.

"It was kind of you to come up," said Meenie.

" 'Tain't done you no good."

"It's something to know that someone's sorry for you."

"Yes, I've told you I'm sorry. What do you mean to do?"

"I can't think. What would you do if *you* were . . . virtuous?"

"Gord!" said the poor wretch. The question seemed to bewilder her. "*I* can't think neither; I—I never was." After a minute she added with decision, "I should 'ave enough to eat anyhow if I was you—as well be 'ung for a sheep as a lamb!"

"Yes, I shall have enough to eat—if they let me stop."

"Oh, they'll let you stop for a bit—they knew you wouldn't get your money this week as well as Madam did. They'll take good care to collar it directly you do."

"But even when she pays me? Their bills are so high."

"You needn't be afride of them losing anything by you. Don't you fret about that! How long 'ave you signed for—two months?"

"Three."

"Ah!" She relapsed into silence.

"What do you mean?"

"Me? Oh, they won't lose anything by you, that's all. . . . Don't you worry about them cutting up rough yet—they're sife to trust you when you're booked for three months. I shall go to bed now. Keep your pecker up. It'll be all the sime in a 'undred years."

"Good-night," said Meenie.

"Goo'-night. . . . That's true what you said just now?"

"What?"

"About your not 'aving a friend?"

"Quite true."

"Because if you've only split with 'im, just you tike my advice quick and mike it up. Never mind what 'e did—mike it up, and tell 'im 'e must get you out of this, if 'e spouts his ticker! Goo'-night."

"Good-night."

"*I'll* pye for the stamp if you're stony. Don't forget."

"I shan't forget; but I've nobody to write to."

"Oh, well!" She lingered at the door regretfully, and then found comfort in the phrase that comprised her philosophy: "It'll be all the sime in a 'undred years," she said again.

## CHAPTER VIII

Relieved from the dread of Montjou clamouring for payment, Meenie was able to behold him with composure on the morrow. The knowledge of the full measure of his rascality was alleviating. She made no reference to her bill; since he understood the circumstances, she was spared the necessity for proffering excuses. But the conversation had made it clear to her that, on one pretext or another, the manageress would withhold the salary until she had forced her to submit to the abominable rules; so even when the costume had been paid for, she couldn't expect any money—she couldn't expect any till she yielded! She was dizzy; she groped in the dark on unfamiliar ground. Strain her eyes as she might, she could not see a step ahead. She told Montjou that in future she would take her meals in the dining-room. He said, "Bien!" She preferred the company of the women in their dressing-gowns to being hungry any longer. Pressure tells.

Madame Le Beau threw her an inquiring

glance, as if to ascertain her frame of mind, when she entered the cabaret that evening. When she quitted it, she received a scowl. The same the next night. On Saturday, on the boulevard de Clichy, she met her manager. She bowed, and instinctively quickened her pace, but he halted promptly, and she was obliged to stop. His greeting signified comprehension and even sympathy.

"Ah, mees, ees it not a very fine day?" he said. "You promenade?"

"Yes," she said, "I'm going for my walk."

"Ze fine weather ees good to make forget, hein? I 'ave always perceived that eef I 'ave trouble and I take my stroll in ze sunshine, my 'eart grow light. N'est-ce pas? Viz me nevare it fail. In Nature zere ees somezing magique."

He turned beside her, and she wondered how he had the audacity to allude to her trouble. He seemed, however, quite unconscious of audacity.

"In London," he said, pursuing his amiable topic with a wave of his cigarette, "quite ze contraire. I was five year in London. Oh, mon Dieu! Ze dark 'ouses, ze black streets, ze solemn, solemn people in a 'urry! You pardon me, mad'moiselle, zat I say so, but in London nevare my 'eart grow light when I promenade—it grow

'eavy, 'eavy! Eef I put on my 'at 'appy, I come 'ome to weep."

"There is Nature in London, too," she said, smiling.

"Ah, oui, but zere ees so little art! And zere ees so little gaieté, zere ees so little lumière. You must feel ze difference? It ees not possible to sing—as you sing, mad'moiselle—vizout a soul; to a woman or a man viz a soul London ees épouvantable. Non, non, non, I make no compliments! You 'ave in ze voice ze tears, ze 'opes, ze sentiment; I remark it at ze re*har*sal. Ven I listen to you, I forget ze café. Vraiment! It 'urt me that you are not content 'ere. Already I 'ave spoke to my wife, but you 'aye irritate 'er. I find it difficult to arrange."

"You have spoken to her about me?" said the girl eagerly; "asking her to pay me, do you mean? Oh, monsieur le Beau, if she only would! If she'd only give me enough to pay my bill and my fare back!"

"You vish so much to go back?" he inquired. "Yes, it ees natural! You not like ze place, and it ees not refined for you. You understand that ven you were engaged I knew nozzing. I would not 'ave allowed that you came 'ere. You were a success in London?"

"Oh, no—far from it!"

"But eef you return, vot will you do? Vizout money you find ze dark London no paradise, hein?"

"No," she admitted, "I shan't find London a paradise, but—— Oh, monsieur Le Beau, you must know what my situation is! I am being cheated at my lodgings—I can't complain, and I can't pay; presently, they'll turn me out! Madame Le Beau says she is keeping back my salary to cover the expense of the costume she bought for me, but it isn't for that—it is to make me like the other women; while I refuse, she will never give it to me! What's to be the end? When the Montjous are tired of waiting, what's to become of me? You say you're sorry I'm not content here: you're the manager—I was engaged to come to you—I hadn't even heard of madame Le Beau till I arrived—if you mean what you say, treat me fairly! Cancel my contract and send me home!"

"Eef I was alone in ze business," he said, "you would not 'ave 'ad to ask. But my wife——" He waved the cigarette again. "It ees not so easy as it appear to you. All ze same I can save you much, and—I may do all."

"Thank you," she answered perfunctorily; she could not feel that she had begged him to do anything arduous.

"Ze fact ees," he went on, "she would complain much to lose you; you can see that we 'ave no one zat compare viz you. Not only your voice —your face, your figure, your grace! Already you are an attraction at ze cabaret."

"Then why can't she be satisfied if I sing? I don't grumble about that. If she'll give me my salary every week, and let me continue to go to the dressing-room between my songs, I'll stop for the three months willingly."

"You 'ave irritate 'er," he murmured. "I shall talk to 'er again; in me you 'ave a friend. You 'ave known zat, yes?"

"N-no," she said.

"I admire you like I 'ave nevare admired. . . . Zat ees true. You 'ave not seen?"

"Seen?"

"Tell me!"

"I'm glad my voice was good enough," she stammered.

"Oh, your voice! If you 'ad no voice, still I should admire. Listen: ze time will come ven all Paris will admire. And one day your voice will be—ah, la voix d'une sirène. Only one zing it vant yet—you 'ave not love. Ven you 'ave been taught to love you vill give to it ze touch magique zat shall make you celebrate."

She stood still and forced a little laugh. "I

hope your good wishes will come true. When I'm celebrated I shall remember them." She tendered her finger-tips. "I'm taking you out of your way."

"Eef I do all you vant," the man questioned slowly, "you vill be grateful to me, hein?"

"I should thank you and madame Le Beau very much." She drew her hand free.

The languid eyelids fell, and he gave the faintest shrug.

"Bonjour, mad'moiselle!" he said.

## CHAPTER IX

THE Montjou couple proved less patient than had been predicted. A few days later the man entered Meenie's room and demanded the sum due to him. She could not understand many of his words, but his voice and gestures were significant enough, as he slapped the bill and shouted at her. Conjecturing that the blonde was in bed and that she spoke a little French, Meenie ran downstairs and beat at her door, Montjou following excitedly.

"They want their money, he's making a row," she explained. "I can't talk to him. Tell him they shall have it as soon as I get it; tell him it's not my fault!"

The blonde appeared on the landing in her ulster. Her French was weak, but her tone was vigorous; she put her arms akimbo.

"What's all this?" she exclaimed. "What are you bullying the girl for? Don't try these games on here—they don't go down. When she's paid she'll pay *you*. You've got to wait!"

"Wait?" He flourished the bill again. "Is

it reasonable that we should board and lodge her for nothing? That cannot be! We have been patient, we have waited too long—we are not to be swindled! Mad'moiselle has been receiving a salary ever since she arrived, and she eats and drinks, and pays nothing."

"Are you trying to kid *me?* Mad'moiselle has *not* received her salary—she hasn't had a sou—and you know very well she hasn't. If you want your money, tell your pals at the show to part—then you'll be all right."

"I have nothing to do with the show; I have nothing to do with the affairs of mad'moiselle. Here is the bill. I want my money."

"She hasn't got any."

"Then I keep her here no more! You understand?" He turned to Meenie: "You must go. I keep your box, and you go. I give you two more days; if you have not paid in two days it is finished!"

"What does he say?" said Meenie.

"He says if you don't pay up in two days, he'll keep your box, and you must go."

"Yes, yes, yes," said the man in English. "Two days. You 'ave 'eard? Two days!" And he returned to the basement muttering.

"Come inside," said the blonde. "Well, you'll 'ave to give in!"

Meenie was very white. "I shall go round to madame Le Beau and tell her what he says."

"What's the good of that, you fool? She's put him up to sye it!"

"I must try. It can't do any harm."

"You'll be wasting your breath. The best thing you can do is to take a shell to-night. When all's said and done, what's the use of fussing? You see 'ow it is; as well do it first as last!"

The girl shook her head. Though she wasn't hopeful she would not neglect a chance; she was determined to make a forlorn attempt to secure fair play. She hurried through the streets, questioning whether she should plead, or threaten. She reflected that her threats would probably be laughed at, for even if she weren't friendless, her charges would be very difficult to substantiate. She had signed the contract, and she had insisted on another costume being provided for her. Who could prove that she had not known she was to pay for it? No, it would be futile to threaten! Ostensibly the manageress was justified in withholding the salary at present; and as to the Montjous' claim, she was no more responsible for her singers' debts in their apartments than for their debts at a jeweller's. The only plan was to plead.

Since they had had their conversation on the

boulevard monsieur Le Beau had wholly ignored her; but he greeted her this morning with a faint smile. She told him that she wanted to see his wife, and he did not remain to witness the interview.

It lasted only a short time. It was not an angry interview; such little anger as was displayed was on the girl's side. The woman talked quite calmly. The position, she repeated, was lamentable; nobody could regret it more than she did—it always pained her to see a girl standing in her own light. Her tone at this moment was truly motherly. If "Mees Veston" would obey the rules, an endeavour should be made to pacify the people at her lodgings until she was able to settle their account; if she continued to be obstinate, she could not expect the manageress to perform friendly services.

"I 'ave to ask you to take your place viz ze ozzers—and be amiable to the customers, bien entendu. Ees it 'yes' or 'no'?"

"No," said Meenie, crying, "I—I can't!"

Nothing more was said. But in the evening, when she left the platform after her first song, she found the dressing-room door locked.

For an instant she thought it had stuck, and she pushed with all her force; then she realised what had been done, and stood staring at it blank-

ly. Perhaps she stood so with her hand on the doorknob for ten seconds; estimated by her emotions it was a long time.

She turned from the door and went back to the crowd, and sat where she saw an empty chair. The only person who had shown her kindness here was bellowing a comic song, and she prayed that when it finished this woman without aspirates and without virtue would come to her side. Across the room their gaze met. Somebody spoke to her, but she made no answer. When she glanced towards the counter she saw that madame Le Beau was watching her. The man at her elbow spoke again. She looked to see if she could change her seat, but there was none vacant, or, in her confusion, she could perceive none.

"'A fair old frisky,
Put-away-the-whisky,
Good old time we had.'"

The singer stepped from the platform amid whistles and cheers. A party of American students broke into the refrain as she neared them; she swept a mock curtsey and flung a piece of slang over her shoulder, but she did not stop. She sauntered to Meenie.

"What's up?" she asked as softly as her voice permitted.

"They've locked the door."

"Come and sit by me then."

Untroubled by bashfulness, she found space promptly enough on a lounge, and until she began to bandy chaff with the men about them, her presence was fortifying. Within her limits she sympathised; she sympathised, not with her reason, but her instinct, and instinct urged her to spare the girl all that she understood her to tremble at. That any girl could tremble at the idea of talking to strangers across a table, however, and imbibing beer at their expense was beyond her comprehension. "Drink," she kept whispering. "Go on! What do you say 'no' for? Well, you *are* a queer one; I never did!"

An Englishman, who had strolled into the Cabaret de l'Homme for no other purpose than to hear Meenie sing "As Once in May" again, thought her reluctance queer too. It was his custom to observe, and he was watching her curiously; he had been watching her ever since she came back and sat down. When one of the group rose and went out, he dropped into his place.

"Are you going to sing 'As Once in May' tonight?" he asked, leaning forward.

She started, and the man told himself that he had really stumbled on a singular study.

"Yes," she faltered.

"I'm glad of that. You sing it well."

She was silent.

"What are you doing in a hole like this?"

"I am engaged here."

"So I see. Why? Couldn't you do anything better?"

"No," she said.

"Don't you want me to talk to you?"

"I'd rather you didn't."

"You prefer the company of the ruffians on the other side of you?"

"I'd rather not talk to anyone."

"All right," he said, "just as you please!"—and he relit his pipe and settled himself comfortably.

More than half an hour passed before he addressed her again, and then there was a good reason for it.

"Would you like to change seats with me?' he inquired.

She accepted the suggestion with alacrity. "Thank you very much," she murmured.

"Perhaps you'd be wise to let me talk to you, after all. It appears necessary for you to lend

an unwilling ear to me or the other fellow, and *I* should probably annoy you less."

"I'm much obliged to you for giving me your seat."

"You needn't be. To be candid, I've been waiting for the chance—I saw it was bound to come. Is our fair compatriot, swallowing her ninth bock, a friend of yours?"

"She has been very kind to me."

"Really? Would it be inquisitive to ask how?"

"In several ways."

"How long have you been singing here?"

"Two or three weeks."

"I only heard you last night. You disappeared between your songs last night."

"Yes, I was in the dressing-room."

"Why aren't you there now?"

"Because I can't get in."

"How do you mean?"

"It's locked."

"Locked? Who locked it?"

"The manageress."

"Is that a fact?" he said with animation. "That's very stimulating. Do tell me more! You've no idea how useful these details may be to me some day. The manageress—meaning the woman with a figure like a feather bed—locked

the door, eh? I suppose to—— No, on second thoughts, *you* shall explain."

"People usually lock a door to prevent other people going in," she answered curtly.

"Now that's brilliant!" he said; "I didn't suspect you shone in repartee. So they do. And whom did the fat lady want to prevent going in?"

"Me."

"You are fascinating, but monosyllabic. Please thaw. I assume she had a motive?"

"She wished me to be here."

"And you declined to accord her that natural pleasure?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't blame you," he said. "In your place I should have been equally ungracious. But I should also have been more prudent. What did you come here at all for?"

"I didn't know what it was like."

"Couldn't the siren consenting to bock number ten have told you?"

"She? I never saw her till I came. I came from England."

"Oh, I understand! You came from England; and now that you're in Rome—— Why don't you go back?"

"I can't; they wouldn't let me off, and——"

"And what?"

"I can't."

The man swept her with a glance. He was old enough to be near believing everything that she implied, but he had not outlived the scepticism of youth entirely.

"I'm sorry for you," he said; "I can imagine what it must be for a girl to have to submit to the attentions of any brute with a franc in his pocket. When you've finished, we must wash the taste of the place out of our mouths with some champagne. We'll go to Marguéry's—or some other restaurant where they'll do us well—and have supper."

"Oh, no, thank you," she said.

"You won't?"

She shook her head. The result of his experiment surprised him most agreeably.

"Please yourself," he said again. "Halloa, it's your turn! I'll keep your seat for you till you come back."

He had intended to leave as soon as the song was over, but when she returned he didn't rise; he remained until the dressing-room door had yielded, and even until he had seen her pass out onto the boulevard. As he sauntered homeward he reflected—as he had been reflecting at intervals throughout the evening—that the experienc-

es of an innocent girl who found herself in one of these cabarets would be interesting to hear; he wished Miss Meenie Weston had been more communicative—she might have given him a lot of information. He wished more than all that he could make up his mind about her. He was baffled. His judgment reproached him that he hadn't advised her to break her agreement, and given her the money to take her back to London; but it is difficult to credit the unlikely, and even while he regretted the omission, he said he was an ass. Still he regretted it.

It occurred to him that the outlay of a sovereign—he thought in English—would at least settle the doubts that were piquing him. He had often given a penny to a child imploring bread and watched him pass the next baker's shop with total unconcern. On the same principle he might test the sincerity of Miss Weston with a pound. He had no superfluity of pounds, but as a student of character he would obtain value for the money.

It was not, however, with any definite purpose that he walked up to the Cabaret de l'Homme on the following night; he told himself on the way that he was going to be disappointed: the girl would be a different being—girls were so often different the second time one met them—

or he wouldn't get a chance to talk to her.

At the moment of entering, he did not see her. The jingling piano, the noisy room, confused him a little; the consciousness of his interest, and the waiter's recognition, made him a little shy. That he might select a desirable seat in the least conspicuous fashion he paused at the counter, and asked for a packet of cigarettes, while his gaze travelled round the faces. Then he moved across to her.

"Good-evening," he said, shifting a chair and wondering if anybody was smiling at him. "So once more the door is locked?"

She gave him a half glance. "Good-evening."

"Have you sung yet?"

"Yes, twice."

"I was coming in earlier," he said, "but then I began to ask myself if I should come at all." After a few seconds he added, "I meant you to say, 'Why did you?' "

But she said nothing.

"Don't you want to know why?"

"It doesn't matter."

"Then I must tell you. I came to talk to you again, if you'll let me."

"You know very well that I can't help it," she answered.

"Oh, you have only to say I'm a nuisance! I

assure you that if you'd rather I left you alone, I won't speak another word."

Her mouth twitched, and she looked at the ground.

"If it isn't you," she said bitterly, "it must be somebody else. What's the difference?"

"Between me and any other cad, eh? Well, Miss Weston, I won't be a cad—perhaps I may even be useful. I swear I don't mean any harm to you, and if you think my advice worth having, you've only to ask for it."

"Thank you," she murmured. "I'm afraid nobody can advise me."

"There's one thing I can advise right off," he said; "take a glass of wine, because the fat lady is scowling at us. It appears to me that if I drink by myself, she's likely to introduce you to somebody more gallant."

"I'd rather not," said Meenie.

"Very well," he said. "You understand why I asked you, though?"

"Oh, yes. I know!"

"You say that as if she had commented on your abstemiousness already."

"When I came in, she—she complained that last night——"

"Are you frightened of her?"

"I think I am. I wasn't at first, but—I've

been through enough to make me frightened."

"Do tell me!"

"It's a long story; I daresay you can guess something of it. I thought I was going to sing at concerts, at a kind of—at a kind of second-rate Steinway Hall. I knew it wouldn't be fashionable of course, because I'm nobody; but I never dreamt of a place like this."

"But when you arrived?"

"I was engaged then; how could I leave? And then she stopped my salary, and——"

"Do you mean you aren't being paid?"

"Oh, I don't need money," she said, hot with the sudden fear that he might think she was appealing for assistance. "I mean that—— Well, I couldn't go away if I had the fare; I'm under contract."

The man muttered something disrespectful to contracts. "If she stopped your salary, how do you live?"

"I'm in apartments."

"Do the people trust you?"

"Y—e—s," she said; "you see, they know her."

"The recommendation isn't obvious. I'm immensely sorry for you. I think I said so yesterday, but now I mean it much more. I'm going to help you."

She caught her breath.

"I'm going to help you; I'll be d—dashed if you shall stop in a den like this. Look here, you must take some money."

"That's impossible," she said; "you must know that it is!"

"I don't know anything of the kind. Don't you believe I mean well to you?"

"It isn't a question of my believing in you. If I were willing to take money from any man I met, I shouldn't be worth helping."

"Do you believe in me?" he persisted. "Tell me the truth: do you, or don't you?"

"I don't know," she stammered.

There was a slight pause.

" 'Aye, there's the rub!' " said the man at last. "Naturally you *don't*. You would be a fool if you did—or else gifted with phenomenal perception. Well, my child, I shan't ask for your confidence—I'm going to pack you straight back to England. How much do you want to take you away? I mean it: I'm going to give it to you. It's a frank offer—give me a frank answer. You shall have what you want before you leave the table; and then we'll say 'Good-night' and 'Good-bye.' "

She sat quivering. Her need of the money was desperate, and her instinct told her that it could be taken safely. She argued that she might

repay it—that it would be merely a loan—but she was a chorus-girl only inasmuch as she had been two years in the chorus; acceptance was horribly difficult to her.

"I can't," she gulped before she knew that she was going to refuse.

"You had better think twice," he said. "Of course, I appreciate your feelings, but I'm quite sure you are being very unwise, and that you'll repent it."

She was already fearing the same thing; if it had not been so hard to say, she would have owned it. While she hesitated, she saw that madame Le Beau was beckoning to her. He saw it, too, and he thought the English girl's submission to that peremptory signal as ugly a sight as his experience had provided.

From his chair he could observe what followed perfectly. She appeared to be given some instructions, and to demur. The woman insisted. In a few seconds they were joined by the manager, and the girl was led to a table near the entrance, where two young men were drinking champagne. Champagne seldom flowed here; evidently customers to be conciliated! The man who was watching began to gnaw his moustache, and he lit a cigarette with a hand that shook a little. His hands always shook when he was

angry; it was a constitutional defect to which he objected very much, because it often conveyed the impression that he was afraid.

He saw her decline the glass that was pressed upon her; her companions expostulated freely. Their voices were indistinguishable—drowned by the piano and the general hum; he did not know if they were speaking French or English. But it was clear that they were intoxicated, and that the girl was painfully confused. Only he and the couple in authority were attending to the scene, and he noted their impatient gestures as she shook her head.

Suddenly—his gaze had scarcely reverted to her when it happened—she was wrestling in an embrace; she sprang to her feet with a half-cry; and her employers were at her side, upbraiding, gesticulating, commanding her compliance. He leapt up and strode towards her, no longer considering whether he made himself conspicuous or not.

"Mad'moiselle, vous êtes vraiment trop prude. Ze gentlemen mean you no 'arm!"

"Mais c'est idiot!" exclaimed the manageress. "J'en ai assez à la fin, voyons!"

"Go and put on your things," he said firmly; "you're coming out of this hole now, and you aren't coming back again." He turned to Le

Beau. "You tallow-faced scoundrel, give her the key of the dressing-room, or I'll break your blasted neck!"

"Mais, m'sieu, m'sieu, m'sieu!" screamed the woman.

The singer stopped, and the audience, starting from their places, listened eagerly. Those who were unable to obtain a view across the heads and hats jumped onto the tables and the chairs. The only spectators who displayed no interest in the disturbance were the two who had caused it. After a stare of dismay, they continued to sip their champagne with drunken solemnity.

Meenie had clutched the man's arm. He saw that their best plan was to gain the street while the proprietors stood confident in the possession of her clothes.

"Quick!" he whispered; "come as you are!"

But Le Beau anticipated the manœuvre, and darted forward.

"J'ai son contrat, m'sieu," he exclaimed, "son contrat signé!"

"Will you let me pass?"

"Pas moyen, m'sieu, pas moyen!"

The pallid fat face with its air of defiance exasperated the man hugely; besides, he was in a hurry. He took the shortest course without a moment's hesitation, and pulled the door open as Le Beau sprawled on the floor.

## CHAPTER X

"CAN you run?" he asked, as their feet touched the pavement; "we'd better disappear as fast as we can—I don't see a cab!"

She was afraid she couldn't run, but she kept pace with him for a few yards as best she could, though her heart was pounding furiously, and her legs felt strangely unreliable. A thin stream of masqueraders from the Moulin Rouge trickled along the boulevard, and he dodged across the road with her into their midst, where she cut less remarkable a figure. In the place Pigalle a cab had just deposited someone. He hailed it promptly; and as she sank inside, it occurred to him for the first time that he didn't know where to take her.

"Rue de l'Arcade!" he said. And as they rattled down the slope he turned and looked at her.

"I'm afraid you must be awfully cold?"

"No," she panted, "not a bit!" She was out of breath, excitement glowed in her cheeks, and her eyes shone through the dusk, wide with gratitude.

He laughed. "It has been rather amusing. You were a good little girl to do just as I told you. If you hadn't we should have been there now. I say, how well do these people know your landlady? Will they send round to her to-night?"

"I don't think so," she faltered.

"Suppose they do—on the off chance of your being there? I think I must take charge of you till the morning."

She shivered, and the hands lying in the satin lap were restless.

"You *are* cold?" he said, bending to her.

"No," she said huskily. . . . "I would rather go back to the lodgings, thank you; I can stay there till to-morrow."

"How can you be sure, now?"

"They told me so," she murmured.

"They told you that you could stay there till to-morrow? Do you mean that to-morrow you had to clear out, anyhow?"

"Yes," she owned, "if I couldn't pay."

"You poor little soul! No, no—I take it back. Without any wish to wound your feelings, you're a dear little fool. You don't deserve to be pitied; I sternly refuse to pity you. You must have been an idiot to say 'no' to the money I offered you. How could you do it?"

"I think I was going to say 'yes,' after all," she said diffidently.

"Mitigating circumstances; but never call yourself a sensible woman when you grow up—there are follies one can't outlive. And, after this, you propose to try to sleep there again, do you? Good Lord! Look here, I'm staying at an hotel; I'll have a talk to the manageress, and she shall find you a room for to-night. After breakfast I'll get your belongings for you, and in the evening you shall depart for the white cliffs of Albion by the 'picturesque and cheap route.' How does that suit you? Are your troubles over?"

She put out her hand, and smiled up at him with tears in her eyes.

"I shall never forget your goodness to me as long as I live!"

"Oh, rot!" he replied, less fluent because he was touched. "Give me the address, and tell me as exactly as you can how much you owe." He pencilled the information on his shirt cuff, and as they entered the rue de l'Arcade shouted to the driver where to stop. "You had better wait in the cab a minute," he said, as it jerked to a standstill; "I'll come out for you as soon as I've explained things; I shan't be long."

He was longer than he expected, for the man-

ageress had retired for the night, and he was left to contemplate the staircase while the porter went to summon her. When she descended, it was necessary to apologise for disturbing her repose: only the exigencies of the situation had emboldened him to commit such an atrocity. Outside was a girl, a young lady, a compatriot whose ignorance of the world had placed her in a most dangerous position. She was homeless, and still attired in the somewhat exiguous costume in which she had been—er—as a matter of fact, rescued! He began to feel like the hero of a novelette. If madame Lahille would have the kindness——?

Madame Lahille overflowed with sympathy. Alas, such dangers were met with only too often in Paris! In London no doubt the same? It was unfortunate that a poor girl seldom found a protector so chivalrous. The lament was emphasised by a gesture of pious admiration, and he reflected that it only remained for Miss Meenie Weston to call him "My preserver," to make him ashamed of the whole episode.

However, this exchange of civilities was occupying precious time, and the girl remained with a bare neck in the cab while an east wind was blowing.

"Madame can place a room at her disposal?" he inquired.

Yes, madame had by singular good luck a vacant room on the fourth floor.

"And a cloak to conceal the costume? the young lady would naturally be reluctant——"

She departed in quest of the cloak, and when it was forthcoming he brought Meenie into the hall. Madame Lahille herself conducted her upstairs, rejoining her, after about ten minutes, with a glass of steaming claret, and a nightdress which was much too large. Clothed in the capacious garment, the girl sat up in bed, sipping the hot wine, and thinking of the man whose name she did not know. She wanted to cry, though it was now her happiest night in Paris. And then, as the wine stole through her veins, and the strange high bed grew friendly, her emotions yielded to a sense of delicious quietude. She did not question what London held for her; her contentment was too deep for that. She was free! The consciousness was a lullaby. "Are your troubles over?" he had said. Oh, he had been good to her, good! She would make him tell her precisely what she had cost him, and directly she had saved it, she would send the money back. It would be lovely to write that letter! She blew out the candle, and wondered who he was, and

what he did, and if he could afford to lend her the money; he didn't look rich, he looked only clever, and strong, and nice. How hard he could hit! She wondered whether she would ever meet him again in England. And while she wondered she fell asleep.

Fortunately the room was not in the front of the house, or she would not have slept for long. She came back from dreamland to receive a message from him in the broken English of the chambermaid. The monsieur had said that mad'moiselle's *bagage* would arrive within an hour. As soon as it came it should be brought up to mad'moiselle, and then monsieur would await her in the salon.

Sunshine lit the room gaily, and the chocolate and *petits pains* were better than at the Montjous'. It was pleasant to nestle so; she abandoned herself to the delight of knowing that for once responsibility had been lifted from her shoulders; the sensation was exquisitely new to her. She had not been able to fold her hands in confidence since her mother died. She could have said, with Dumas *fils,* "My father was a child that I had when I was young."

A slow smile dimpled her face as the heavy ascent of the porter reached her ears. He had no sooner closed the door than she sprang out of

bed, and made the best toilette that the contents of her trunk permitted. She had hidden the costume in the wardrobe, and now she took it down and stuffed it in the box. She needed badly the things that had been left at the cabaret, especially the jacket, and would have much liked to effect an exchange. It must be chronicled that she lingered before the glass longer than was her custom, and although her vanity was not above the average, she put on a crépon blouse, instead of a warm one, because it suited her better.

The monsieur greeted her in the salon, faithful to his word; she was glad, as he looked at her, that she had been firm with herself about the blouse.

"I needn't ask if you've slept well," he said; "your face proclaims it. Were your things all there?"

"Yes—everything, I think. I do hope you know how immensely grateful I am! I suppose you had to pay more than was fair; will you let me have the bill, please?"

"Here it is, duly receipted. They're charming people—I can quite understand your reluctance to leave them. They knew all about the row, of course, and pretended to know nothing. They were so sorry to part with you that they

wanted another week's rent in lieu of notice; it was fortunate you told me that they were turning you out. But behold, the affair is finished! Let us forget it, and be merry. Let us eat and drink, for this evening you go. Come out to lunch!"

It was as yet too early to lunch, but that was no reason why they should remain in the hotel. Of a truth the little salon was somewhat cheerless, with its faded furniture and an album of Swiss views. When she reappeared, with a hat and gloves on, they sauntered towards the Boulevard in good spirits. He was exhilarated in reflecting that the morning had brought no disenchantment; it was the first time that he had seen her by daylight clothed like a Christian, and he approved the difference.

"Now I come to think of it," he said, "we've never been introduced. It's not a matter of thrilling interest, but my name is Lingham—Ralph Lingham." He pronounced it Rafe.

"I am glad to know your name," she said; "I was going to ask you what it was. Do you live in Paris?"

"Yes; that is to say, I'm going to. I've only been here a week or so, but I hope to be a fixture. Where do *you* live? London?"

"I always stay in London between the engage-

ments; of course, when I'm lucky I'm on tour."

"Why? Is it easier to get engagements for a tour than for town?"

"I've nearly always found it so. I'm only in the chorus, you know, and I take what is offered."

"You took what was offered once too often," he said. "Haven't you any people to look after you?"

"I lost my father before I went on the stage. No, I've no relations that I ever see. One gets used to it, you know. It was awful at first, but when I'm on tour, and the salary is all right, it isn't so lonely as you'd think. Some of the girls are generally nice, and one usually finds a chum; two girls live together every week, and halve the rent and the housekeeping expenses, and—if it's a deluge—the cost of a cab to the station on Sunday morning. It comes out much cheaper that way, too."

"And if it's not a deluge, how do you get to the station then? Walk, with your trunk on your back?"

"Oh, the baggage-man collects the girls' luggage the night before; we have only light things to carry. If we took cabs regularly we should be ruined. Of course, if you happen to get in just when the people are coming out of church, is isn't pleasant, tramping through a town with

a rug and a bag in your hands. That's horrid! You do feel such a mummer, so ashamed of yourself!"

"Good," he said, "I like that."

"You'd like it?"

"I mean I like the idea. I see it. The smug provincials in their Sunday black, and the tired little actress lugging a portmanteau through the High Street. Well, tell me more."

"There isn't any more to tell," she laughed, "except that sometimes, when you're *very* foolish and the stage manager has bullied you, or a girl who has the honour of a single line all to herself has sneered at you as 'one of the chorus,' you dream dreams."

"Oho," said Lingham, "you dream dreams, do you? This grows interesting. 'For I, too, have known my dreams!' What are they?"

"Mine? Oh, well, for five minutes I imagine myself springing into a big part, and getting tremendous notices, and heaping coals of fire on my enemies' heads. It's quite exciting while it lasts, almost as good as the real thing. All the people are so fond of me, and so crushed to remember that they were ever unkind. But I don't really expect to get on any more; all that is over."

"Vanished with your youth? Why not, for

goodness' sake, why shouldn't you get on? You've a sweetly pretty voice."

She sighed. "No, I shall never get on, and it wouldn't satisfy me if I did—I wanted to do serious work, and that's impossible. Naturally I should be very glad to 'arrive'—I should be delighted—but the success wouldn't be so dear to me as if I sang good music." She pointed to the Opera House. "Once upon a time I saw myself there, and—well, you know where you found me."

"I'm very glad I did find you. By the way, how about the clothes you left behind? What were they?"

"Oh, a dress," she said, "and a toque, and—and a jacket."

"Don't you want them?"

"Well, the dress had seen its best days, and the toque wasn't worth anything. I should like the jacket, though, if you think it could be got."

Benighted man awoke to the fact that she was jacketless. If he piqued himself on anything, it was on his closeness of observation. His chagrin was severe, and his Scotch tweed became on the instant a burden and a reproach.

"Why, what have I been thinking of?" he exclaimed. "You must be frozen. Now I notice it, that thing you have on is flapping; we must

get another jacket at once!" He looked agitatedly at a confectioner's. "Where is there a shop where they sell such things?"

"What an idea!" she returned. "It isn't necessary at all. As a matter of fact"—it cost her something to make the admission—"I have a much warmer blouse at the hotel; I have heaps and heaps of clothes. Please come on."

"I must really insist," said Lingham. "You can pay me back, you know. I think you are in a position to afford a jacket. It is your own money, and you can afford it; you mustn't be mean. I beg you now—oblige me!"

He would talk of nothing else, and the harmony of the morning seemed to be in grievous peril. At last she consented, on the understanding that he would render her a faithful account of her indebtedness to him before they parted, and—fleeing from the Grand Boulevard as from a plague—she led him to the Printemps, where a fool of an assistant took her for his wife.

Though this mistake was productive of momentary embarrassment, their visit to the Printemps was, to Lingham at least, singularly charming. Nor was the charm less because their compact debarred him from obtruding his advice. Her economy was invincible, and the frowns with which she rebuked his tentative

temptations added a zest to the whole thing. "I shall *never* be shown anything moderate," she whispered to him once: "your expression as you sit there is simply fatal!" Then, too, when she had had her way, and some cheaper jackets had been displayed, it was delightful to have her turn to him in a captivating bargain with a *chic* collar, and say, "What do you think?" He found it so delightful that he immediately suggested she should try on another. He had never spent forty-five francs with greater satisfaction than when they turned into the street again; but she insisted on putting the bill into one of the smart little pockets, and vowed that she would keep it there till she had been honest.

It was now nearly one o'clock, so they proceeded to a restaurant. It was not a fashionable restaurant, for he was neither a rich man nor a fool, although in the pursuit of knowledge he had invited her to Marguéry's. He took her to a small, and rather shabby, establishment to which few foreigners found their way. Here they secured a table to themselves, and after the sauterne was uncorked, he said:

"I propose to make a daring experiment; I'm going to try to renew an emotion. The last time I was in Paris I was brought to this place and introduced to quenelles with a pink sauce. Years

have passed, but I have never forgotten that pink sauce. We are about to meet again. It is a solemn moment."

When the waiter came back, both were silent. The sauce was thick, like warm cream, and the soft little balls had the appearance of miniature dumplings. She broke one diffidently, and raised the fork to her mouth, her companion watching her in suspense. The cream clung to her lips, and the tip of her tongue did the duty of a table napkin. Her eyes smiled. A ripple of enjoyment curved her fair cheeks, and—her head tilted—she gave him a slow nod.

"I think so too," he said; "I think my youthful homage was fully justified, eh?"

"The daring experiment is a brilliant triumph," declared Meenie. "Do you often try to renew emotions?"

"Long ago," he replied, "before my infatuation for the pink sauce, I was infatuated by a lady. When I bade her good-bye with a bursting heart, I ventured to hope that one day I might see her again. She was a lady in your profession, and she said, 'I have never found a Revival a success.' Experience has taught me to appreciate her philosophy. The quenelles have been the exception that proves the rule. Let

me give you some more of the sauce, and use your bread when the paste has gone."

She had never sat so long at a meal in her life, for they lingered quite half an hour over the fruit and coffee. He mentioned casually that some of the habitués were men whose names were familiar to her, and though he was not able to identify them, the knowledge that celebrities came here communicated to several commercial gentlemen in the room an instant fascination. She was sorry when there was no excuse for remaining longer in this enchanted spot where luncheons were poetised, and poets lunched; but he had finished his liqueur, and she dared not take one herself. Fearful of being a nuisance as well as an expense, she asked him now if he had no business to attend to and if she had not better make her way back to the hotel alone. He assured her that he should do his work only in the evening after she had gone, and he looked so crestfallen at the inquiry that it was evident he had had other views.

"What I was going to suggest," he explained, "was that you should go back and put on that warmer blouse, and come for a drive. Your train goes at nine o'clock, so we have at least six hours. Why spend them in yawning at Swiss photographs in the salon? We'll go for a drive, and

have tea at Neal's, and I'll get you some English papers to amuse you on the boat in case you can't sleep. Don't spoil a pleasant programme. Come!"

## CHAPTER XI

"HAVE you been here before?" he asked, as they rolled into the avenue du Bois. "Have you seen much of Paris?"

"I've never been so far as this," she answered happily; "when I got to the Arc de Triomphe I turned back. Don't laugh at my accent. I used to go for a walk every afternoon, though—all sorts of places! When I came to the name of a street that I'd met in books, I stood and thrilled at it. And I asked the way to the Pont Neuf, because I knew *'Henri Quartre est sur le Pont Neuf.'* Athos told D'Artagnan, didn't he? Or somebody said it in Eugène Sue? Anyhow, I knew it was an equivalent for 'Queen Anne is dead' when I was a child, and it seemed wonderful to go and prove it a solid fact."

"You're a very nice girl," he said; "I've done that sort of thing myself so often!"

"Isn't it rapturous? I don't think any city would be so exciting to me as Paris, just because I should never come across familiar names in any other. When I was at home—I mean when my

father was alive—I had a girl come to stay with me from the country. It was her first visit to London; and I took her out and showed her Hertford House, which was Lord Steyne's in *Vanity Fair,* you know, and the fountain in the Temple that they came to in *Martin Chuzzlewit,* and the two-pair-back in Brick Court where Oliver Goldsmith's laundress found him dead in the morning. Well, she had lived in a village all her life, and read nothing. My information left her absolutely wooden, for she had never heard of one of the people I was talking about. It would be just the same with me if I went to Berlin, or St. Petersburg."

"I can't imagine you 'wooden' in any circumstances," said Lingham. "A girl in your situation here, who could go out and thrill at a statue——"

"Oh, well, but I had to do something, you know," she interposed. "I should have gone mad if I'd sat in my room all day, thinking. I didn't even have anything to read."

"You are fond of reading, eh?" he said. "What do you read?"

"I've read very little. At home we had a dilapidated collection of the novels that everybody knows, but since I've been alone I have scarcely seen a book. Sometimes on tour I find a circu-

lating library, but they generally want a half-crown deposit, and half-crowns don't lie about 'promiscuous.' Do you read novels?"

"Yes," he said. He hesitated a little. "I suppose everybody takes an interest in his own business. I write 'em."

"You are an author?" exclaimed Meenie. "Really? I wondered what you did. Do you write as 'Ralph Lingham'?"

"Oh yes. But pray don't run away with the idea that I'm a famous person. You are not likely to get any of my books at the circulating libraries next time you're on tour, even if there's an available half-crown. You are talking to an able-bodied failure."

"I wondered what you did," she said again. "I thought perhaps you were a journalist."

"Well, just now I'm a journalist too—of sorts. It's journalism that has brought me to Paris. What made you guess it?"

"Something you said in the cabaret. You asked me about madame Le Beau and said the details might be useful to you one day."

"Ah, I was thinking of a novel then. It struck me that the experiences of a girl like you in a place like that would be worth treating. How did you come there? Was it through an advertisement, or what?"

"I was engaged by an agent," she said.

"What, a regular theatrical agent?"

"Oh, no, not an agent who is known at all. But, of course there are plenty of little agencies one hasn't heard of—I took it for granted he was all right. I was at Potter's one day, and a woman spoke to me. You know girls often speak to one another while they're waiting. She told me that she might be coming too, and that there were vacancies. I went over to his office with her, and was engaged to leave the next evening."

"Humph," he said. "And she didn't come, too?"

"No, she couldn't get out of an engagement that she had made for the provinces. It was a good thing for her!"

His eyebrows rose. "I shouldn't act on another of that woman's suggestions if I were you. She probably never meant to come. Hasn't it occurred to you yet that she was working for the man?"

"I must be awfully stupid," said Meenie in a whisper, after a pause. "I ought to have thought of that, and I didn't. I wonder if you're wronging her?"

"Perhaps I am, but don't give her the benefit of the doubt," he answered sharply. "Don't you see that you invite these catastrophes if you go

about London jumping at every stranger's bait? Before you accept an engagement to sing abroad, you should make inquiries. For a rational being it seems to me your behaviour was the most extraordinary I ever heard of in my life." Solicitude and rage are contiguous in man; the thought of the danger she had run boiled in him.

"It was very foolish," she admitted.

"It wasn't 'foolish,' it was insane. Your innocence seems to have been positively Galatean. How on earth a normally sensible girl—you appear to be normally sensible—could placidly place herself in the power of people she knew nothing about, in a country where she couldn't speak the language, at a word from somebody she'd never seen before, is—is—— Well, it beats me! You aren't fit to be on the stage; you ought to be in a nursery."

She did not seek to defend herself, and they leant back in the fiacre in silence, he frowning to the right and she looking humbly to the left. Presently the horse's head was turned and they commenced the homeward course. Lingham glanced at her, and saw that she wore the air of a rebuked child. He felt that he had expressed his opinion with more heat than courtesy, but he was still so indignant with her that he couldn't

find it in his heart to confess that he was sorry. Compromising with his penitence, he said:

"I wonder why nurses wear such long cap-strings in France?"

"Perhaps they are for the babies to play with."

"Yes, I daresay; I didn't think of that. Well, have you enjoyed your drive?"

"Very much indeed," she murmured. "It has been beautiful."

"I didn't bully you, did I?" he asked deprecatingly.

"What you said was quite right; I must appear a perfect baby to you. Of course, I do behave in a very guileless fashion. All the same, it wasn't quite so inexcusable as you think; we girls are used to signing agreements with managers we don't know. If every time an engagement was offered to me I stopped to make inquiries I should never get one at all. While *I* was inquiring, it would be given to somebody else."

"I understand," said Lingham. "But between an opera company playing in the English theatres and a vague engagement for Paris there's a lot of difference."

She nodded. "Oh, yes! Only when you are badly in need of something to do, and the chance is there, you naturally hesitate to lose it. For

that is what it would mean in nine cases out of ten if you weren't prompt: you would lose it! I own that it never occurred to me to ask for time to consider, but even if it had, I should have been afraid to do it. Perhaps I should have been more discreet in happier circumstances, but most people would have leapt at an offer in my place."

"You were hard up," he asked, "eh?"

"Hard up?" she echoed. "Yes, I was tolerably hard up. I had been to the agents' offices every day for months; I was pretty nearly desperate. When the chance came, I thanked God."

"It seems rather worse than being a novelist," he said. "Then you lived in lodgings, and were in debt there, too?"

"No, I wasn't in debt; I just kept out of that. I pawned things that had belonged to my father, and—and economised."

"Ate too little, I suppose you mean? What did you have for dinner?"

"Oh, don't be absurd," she said, averting her head.

"I asked because I wanted to know. I've dined on tobacco myself, and got up late because bed was cheaper than breakfast; I wondered whether you could give me any hints. Well, what would you have done if the offer hadn't been made just when it was?"

"I should have attacked my wardrobe," she answered, "and pawned a white silk frock."

"And when the frock had gone? I'm not an expert, but I take it that even a white silk frock wouldn't have kept you indefinitely."

"I hadn't looked beyond the frock. . . . I might have spared a pair of shoes."

"And after the shoes? The deluge?"

"I don't know," she said. "I should have hoped for dry weather."

He turned to her, and looked away, and sat with furrowed brows. At last he said on high notes:

"But I don't see what you have to expect when you get back! It seems to me that you'll be in just the same predicament as you were before you left. Will it be any easier to find an engagement now than it was three weeks ago?"

"I hope so," said Meenie. "Of course, the trouble was, that companies aren't sent out during the pantomime season; and the pantomime companies were all complete."

"Well, they're complete still, I suppose?" he said. "The pantomimes haven't begun yet; how will you be able to wait for them to finish? I thought that when you were back in London you would be out of the wood, but I—I don't see what service I shall be doing you by sending you

home, after what you say. Barring miracles, there would be only a white silk frock and a pair of shoes between you and the workhouse."

She looked at him blankly.

"Well, isn't it so?" he said; "or haven't I understood you properly?"

"Y-e-s, that's right," she faltered. "But it's quite certain I can't stop here. I can't sing French—there is no likelihod of my finding anything to do in Paris."

"By what you tell me, there is very little likelihood of your finding anything to do in London. You say you had been out of an engagement for months—why should you expect to walk into one within a few days of your return? The only thing that I see before you in London is destitution. If you are satisfied to starve, you may as well do it where you are, and avoid the additional discomfort of a journey on a cold night."

He folded his arms, and his brow rucked again; Meenie was thankful that he did not say any more. He had told her nothing that she had not told herself in moments, even while she was struggling to amass the fare—nothing that she would have not repeated on the boat. But during the last few hours she had been sanguine; and now her courage had all gone. It was quite true! There were before her the same obstacles

that she had left behind. London had not altered; the bills would be just as hard to pay, the agents' offices would be just as full; when she had been back a day, her position would be just as critical.

After a long silence, she said:

"Perhaps my accent wouldn't be so much against me in the chorus here, after all? What do you think?"

The cab had stopped, and he rose, and helped her out. "While there's tea there's hope," he quoted. "Here we are at Neal's! We'll go upstairs and talk it over."

But he was not confident of her obtaining an engagement in a Paris theatre; and at their table in the reading-room, by one of the low, arched windows, they talked for a long time. She was too frank to ignore the fact that, primarily at least, he would feel responsible for her welfare if she remained; whereas, if she went, his responsibility would be over by nightfall.

"You say I may as well starve here as there," she said; "but you know very well you wouldn't let me starve—at all events, while you were able to prevent it. I should be a regular old man of the sea to you."

"I should do my best to find you bread and butter certainly," admitted Lingham. "On the

other hand, if you went back, I should feel bound to lend you rather more than I could afford. It's really a matter for your own decision; for God's sake don't think that I'm trying to play Providence to you! If you want to go, go! But, as I keep saying, I don't see that you'll be a scrap better off there than here. Now that you're in Paris, why not try to find something to do in Paris?"

"But you tell me that you don't think I *could* get into a theatre here?"

"Well, put the theatre idea aside; the managers aren't waiting for you on their doorsteps in England either. You might get into a theatre here eventually, but I should imagine it would be very difficult, and I shouldn't say it would be very desirable. I don't see how you are to wait for a theatrical engagement anywhere; if I were you, I should take whatever I could get for the present."

"Washing?" she asked hopelessly .

"Not necessarily washing. Take—take anything to tide you over. You needn't leave the stage for good; the agents can be written to, I suppose? When the pantomimes have finished —when there's a chance for you at home—you can throw the work up."

"I'll do anything that's possible," she declared.

"If I could earn ten shillings a week in Paris, of course it would be better for me than returning to London just now."

"That's precisely my opinion. . . . Very well. Then it is decided that you don't go to-night?"

"Yes," she said, "it's decided that I don't go."

She looked down wonderingly at the street, at the rolling carriages, the movement on the sidewalk opposite. She wasn't going! It seemed very strange, a little unreal.

## CHAPTER XII

She spent the evening in the salon; for company she had a book that he had bought for her before they left the library. On impulse he had taken up one of his own, and it was no sooner in her hands than he regretted the choice, conscious that if she uttered unintelligent criticism she would destroy a great deal of interest that he was feeling in her. The novel seemed to her now so uncommonly clever that she was diffident of acknowledging to herself how clever she did think it. It was a double pleasure to learn by the page of excerpts that Baron Tauchnitz appended that many of the reviewers shared her opinion. She found this page laurels for her hero's brow, and a feather in her own cap.

He, meanwhile, was shut in his bedroom, finishing his causerie for *The Other Side,* a newly established and temerarious journal, for which he was acting as Paris correspondent. A course of newspaper work is the best possible training for a novelist, but novel-writing does little or nothing to make a newspaper man, and in jour-

nalism Lingham found his pen stubborn and his style stiff. Meenie, who sat glowing with admiration of *Angela Brown, Publisher,* would have marvelled greatly could she have seen to the third floor, where the author was muttering curses and calling himself an impostor and an ass.

When he had thrust the copy into an envelope with a final imprecation it was one o'clock. As he smoked his last pipe his mind reverted to the need of obtaining employment for her, and he wondered whether, after all, he had advised her for the best.

He wanted to place her in a situation without delay—for one reason because he knew she would be distressed if he didn't. He wished that he had more acquaintances in Paris. The right thing for her would be a companion's post; companion to an amiable widow, who was eager to pay somebody to read aloud and feed her canaries. It was a pity that the right thing was always so difficult to find. He had been looking for the right thing himself for years—ever since he discovered the truth of Scott's dictum that literature made a good cane, but a poor crutch—and the best substitute that he had grasped was this offer of a regular salary from a paper. No, a companion's post was the Ideal, a pendant to his own dream

of a snug Government appointment. Well, he must think of something that was practicable; perhaps the *New York Herald* would send an illuminating beam on the morrow.

Early in the day they went out together to buy it, and on the way Meenie told him how much she had enjoyed the book. He had an unappeasable appetite for praise in print, and a horror of it by word of mouth, but his fear that she would be stupid was shortlived, and he soon found himself answering her as freely as if she had been a fellow-craftsman. It was not until they had glanced at the *Herald* that silence fell between them. He saw that the disappointment had depressed her.

At last he said:

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll look up an artist that I know here; she is a cousin of mine. Perhaps you wouldn't mind sitting to her in costume, if she wants a model? You might be 'The Queen of the May, mother,' or 'Coming through the Rye.' I don't know what they pay for that kind of thing, but I suppose it would mean a franc or two an hour. What do you say?"

"I should be very much obliged to you."

"All right, I'll go this afternoon. Mind, it's very tiring work!"

"Oh, that doesn't matter a bit. If she will

take me, I shall be only too glad. Why didn't you propose it before?"

"I wanted to get you something better. Still, we can watch the advertisements, and you might go as model to her temporarily. On the whole, it isn't a bad idea."

He knew that his cousin was staying somewhere in the Latin quarter, and when he had found his note of her address he tramped over there. His conscience pricked him that he had not called on her when he arrived, for she was a very nice girl, and although they seldom saw each other, and never corresponded, they were always good friends when they met.

Georgina Blair was much younger than he, not three-and-twenty yet. When she was a child she said she wanted to be an artist—meaning a painter—and her mother smiled. Children always want to be funny things; sometimes they want to be circus-riders. When she was seventeen she said it again, more firmly, and her mother screamed. Mrs. Blair had two thousand a year, and a carriage with a crest on it. ("But you will not put your name, *which is mine too,* on the covers of printed books?" cried George Sand's mother-in-law.) Every artist has obstacles to vanquish; the two thousand a year and the crest had been Miss Blair's. And they were not a

whit less formidable than the impediments which lend themselves to more sympathetic treatment in biographies. Yet she had surmounted them, and without brutality. To an art class—meaning a school for painting—in Newman Street, to the British Museum, and to the "National" had she wooed her way by turn, and now, culminating triumph, she had reached the quartier Latin. In remembering these things Lingham reached it also, and after several inquiries, discovered the pension de famille that sheltered her.

It was not imposing.

Yes, a nice girl, a decidedly nice girl! He would have said it as soon as she entered, even if he had not said it before. She had honest brown eyes, and a frank hand-clasp, and a mouth that was firm enough to be admirable, and not too firm to be sweet.

"Halloa, Ralph!" she said; "so you have found me. The mater wrote me you were in Paris. I've been afraid you'd call when I was out. Put your hat away, and tell me all the news. If you sit down on that chair very carefully, it won't break. What is this thing you have dropped into, eh? 'Paris correspondent' sounds very fine."

"It sounds finer than it is in my case," he an-

swered. "Still, two guineas a week is something."

"It's immense," she said sincerely. "I've never earned two guineas in a year. You have always needed a salary from somewhere to enable you to write in peace, haven't you? And when have you another book coming out?"

"In the spring. I've just placed it, and had a hundred pounds on account of royalties. Altogether I am dazed by my own wealth. Really, though, I begin to see my way, now that I've got this job on *The Other Side*. My journalism so far is rather like an omelette made by a plain cook, but my hand will get lighter with practice."

"And the novel," inquired Miss Blair, "is that good?"

"Yes, I think it's all right. There are one or two original features in it; I have a Jew who is neither a money-lender nor an old clo' man; and he can pronounce his w's and talks like all the Jews one ever meets. He'll be a new type in fiction."

"Where are you living?"

"I'm at a little hotel in the rue de l'Arcade; but I'm going to move; I only went there while I looked about me. Well, how are you getting on? You are not over here by yourself, are you

—or has the emancipation reached even that stage?"

"Not quite. I came over with a girl I used to know at Heatherley's. The mater approves of her, and we chaperon each other."

"And the work?"

She ran her fingers through her fringe and frowned.

"So so. I'm pegging away, and I think I know more than I did. But so many people have talent—it's very discouraging. Perhaps I shall do something decent in twenty years."

"'Them's my sentiments,'" said Lingham. "And I can't afford to wait twenty years. In twenty years I shall be fifty-five."

"Oh, you!" she laughed. "You are 'made.' The public have never heard of *me*. If the critics wrote about me as they do about you, I should be a happy woman."

"Because recognition is all you need; *I* need money as well. Heaven knows I don't undervalue the criticisms I've had, but I want something substantial too. It is easier for a writer with scruples to get fine criticisms than to get a living, take my word for it. Hence the job on the paper. I say, Georgie!"

"What?"

"I want you to do something for me."

"And hence this visit!" she exclaimed.

"Not altogether," said Lingham; and then he told her the circumstances.

She listened at first with evident amusement; but as the seriousness of the situation became clear to her, the smile faded, and she ran her fingers through her fringe more than once. When he made his request that she would give Meenie employment as a model, her gesture told him that the plan was hopeless before she spoke.

"My dear Ralph," she said, "I don't employ models. You want a full-blown artist, not a student; I'm at Colarossi's. I'd do it with pleasure if I were able, but I couldn't have a model here even if I wanted one. If there is anything else——"

"She doesn't require a fiver," he said; "I mean she wouldn't accept it. She's—it sounds, of course, very improbable after the story of how I met her—she's a lady. I know *I* shouldn't believe it either if somebody told me the story. It's one of those things that nobody ever believes unless it happens to himself."

"*I* don't disbelieve it," she replied. "On the contrary, I'm very much interested. I should like to come to the rescue. I wonder if she'd be of any use to madame Pigeonneau."

"I wouldn't allow her to go sitting to anybody

and everybody," he answered quickly. "I shouldn't have suggested her becoming a model at all if it hadn't been that I thought she could come to *you*."

"Madame Pigeonneau," explained Miss Blair, "isn't an artist; she keeps this pension. She is an invalid, and her daughter, who used to look after things, has just married. I know the old lady wants somebody to help her now. Does the girl speak French?"

"Not a syllable," said Lingham. "She doesn't even think she does."

"That's a pity."

"I suppose it's a fatal objection?"

"It's a drawback, but, after all, if she is intelligent . . . madame Pigeonneau speaks English a little; it's an English house, you know, and there are only eight of us here—all budding geniuses from perfidious Albion, or America. I'll talk to her if you like, and let you know what she says. I don't suppose the salary would be much—the establishment is on a very modest scale altogether—but the place would be comfortable, and more homelike than any other that you're likely to find."

It looked to Lingham so desirable a solution of the difficulty that he begged her to use all her influence to compass it. She promised to post a

line to him in the evening to say whether she had succeeded.

Of course, when he returned to the hotel he told Meenie that they mustn't build on success; but there was none the less a prospect, and it was pleasant to discuss. On the other hand, she turned very pale the next morning when he showed her a letter making an appointment for her to call. Her eagerness to secure the position had not abated during the night, but she trembled now at the thought of coming back with the news that she had failed. It had been bad enough to fail at the agents' offices when she was paying her own expenses; to-day, when they were being paid by somebody else, she felt that a rejection would be bitterer still. She admitted something of the sort.

"If she doesn't take me, I shall never have the courage to come back and tell you so," she said. "And I don't suppose for a second that she will! I am so used to being disappointed that I apply for things with a disappointed look. Before I go in I try to conjure up a sunny expression, but a long course of the dramatic agents has done its fatal work and my face feels stiff."

"*I* don't suppose for a second that she'll arrange with you either," said Lingham gaily. "I

thought I had been insisting on the fact all yesterday."

"Oh, that was before the letter came. Then it was different. It rests with me now—whether she likes me or not. You would have done much better to put me on the boat and get rid of me, you know! Think what it will mean if I meet with one refusal after another. That's the fear that is paralysing me. If this woman says I'm no use, we shall try to make light of the matter. *I* shan't feel much like making light of it, but *you'll* be very nice, and say it wasn't to be expected I should find anything so quickly, and all that sort of thing. And then there'll be another; and you'll be nice to the 'old man of the sea' again. But it is the 'old man of the sea' that I shall be to you, just as I warned you, and—and be degrees you'll wonder why on earth you were so generous."

"If you were ever a sanguine and cheery conversationalist," he said, "the dramatic agents have a lot to answer for, indeed. I thought I was bad enough myself, but compared with you I'm Mark Tapley."

"Oh," she cried, "I should be hateful if I didn't worry! You're a man, you don't understand. A man always thinks a girl is satisfied to be treated like a child in money matters. Can't you

put yourself in my place? Can't you imagine that I am just sick with anxiety to—to——"

He patted her arm. The sudden passion in her voice embarrassed him.

"Yes, I will say it," she went on—"to show that I'm worthy! You think I'm a nice little fool—you have the right to think me a fool; as you say, I behaved like Galatea!—but I'm not such a fool that I don't understand you took me on trust in the face of the most awful circumstances. Well, I want you to see that your trust wasn't misplaced in any way—in *any* way: I want you to see—I want to prove to you—that you didn't pick up a girl who is content to sponge on you. That isn't prettily put; it's rather coarse, isn't it? But it's exactly what I mean. I want to prove that you didn't pick up a girl who is content to sponge on you."

She whisked by him with her head low before he could reply. She was rather ashamed of her vehemence, and more than ever she felt that madame Pigeonneau's decision would be unfavourable. She had no expectation of success whatever as she made the journey. So when she was engaged, the miracle was thrice blessed.

Lingham was waiting for her in the hall, rehearsing phrases of consolation; and she ran towards him, laughing and breathless.

"I've got it!" she exclaimed. "Oh, I am so grateful! Your cousin is a dear; she had stayed in on purpose to introduce me. Madame Pigeonneau isn't laid up—I expected to find her in bed—she has only a weak heart—oh, and a good heart! She was very nice to me, and said I was *gentille!* Did you know I was *gentille?* I'm to go at once—to-morrow, and—well, I'll tell you all about it properly! When I went in madame Pigeonneau said, 'So zis is ze young lady?' Your cousin said I was; and *I* said I was, and then there was a little pause—I just quaking in my shoes, you know, and trying to look composed and dignified all the while. Then madame Pigeonneau asked me if I had any experience, and I was able to say that I had kept house for my father from the time I was sixteen. That went a long way. She asked if I would get up early and go marketing with Julie—Julie is the servant—and whether I would learn a list of French words in my spare time—the beef, the mutton, the cauliflower, and the potatoes. When I said that my French extended as far as that already, the sensation was enormous! Well, I'm not to have any salary for three months—that's the worst part of it, because I shan't be able to pay what I owe you yet—but I have got the

place, and I should like to shout 'hurrah' at the top of my voice."

The demonstration was not practicable where they were, and in the evening, when he took her to the Nouveau Cirque to celebrate the triumph, her excitement had subsided. Nevertheless it was a very happy evening. In no hours had he found her so attractive, so ready to see a jest, or to make one, as in these. He regretted that their brief intimacy was ending. There was even a touch of sentimentality in his mood as he reflected that on the morrow she would be gone. As for the girl, she knew that she would miss his companionship more than she would have believed it possible to miss the presence of a man whom she had known so short a time. It comforted her to remember that Miss Blair was an inmate of the pension de famille, for that meant that he would come there sometimes.

"We shall often see each other," said Lingham as if in response to her thought. They had had chocolate at a café, and were strolling home. The lamps on the Boulevard shone clear and cold, and there was the swishing of the brown, leafless trees in the wind.

"I hope so," said she. "But we shan't see each other before I go—I want to arrive there very

early. So when we say good-night we will say good-bye too."

"I shall get up and see you off," he answered.

"I would rather you didn't: good-byes in the early morning are always so sad, don't you think? Besides, it won't really be good-bye at all, will it? I——" She hesitated. "I am always saying it, and my words sound emptier in my ears every time, but to-night I must tell you again that——"

"Oh, no," he said, "don't please! Let us take it for granted; I know all you would like to say, and it's really so unnecessary. I wish I could have done more; you're going into this thing like a little trump, and you're gay, and you're brave about it, but don't imagine that I don't know it must have its sting to you all the same."

"It hasn't," she said; "honestly, it hasn't! Once I daresay . . . but not now."

"I shall often come there," he said again. "When you have a holiday you must let me spend it with you. I suppose you will get a holiday sometimes?"

"I didn't ask," she said; "I expect I shall. It's queer to feel that Paris is going to be my home; I may stop here for years, mayn't I? I may never go on the stage again. After all I don't know why I should; I have only done it for a living, and I shall have a living without it now."

"They say it is very difficult to leave the stage," he replied; "almost as difficult as to get on it."

"It wouldn't be difficult to me," said the girl. "Talking of the stage, did you ever write a play? I thought when I read your book that it would make a very fine play. And *Angela Brown, Publisher,* would be a striking title."

"I'm not sure that it would be a good title for a play . . . but I don't know; I can see it on the busses! Perhaps one day I *shall* try my hand at dramatic work. It never occurred to me to dramatise *Angela Brown, Publisher,* though. . . . You're really determined that I'm not to see you off in the morning?"

"I would rather you didn't," she repeated. "Madame Pigeonneau asked me to get there as soon as I could, and I want to leave at seven."

"Very well. . . . You're in a feverish hurry to run away from me."

"Not that; but to—to leave off being a burden," she said.

"You're unkind; do you know you hurt me very much this morning? You mustn't say that I have found you a burden."

"The word was bad," she owned; "I didn't mean to hurt you." She looked away from him, between smiles and tears.

"I shall miss you to-morrow," said Lingham

impulsively. "I should like to have—I wish I hadn't meddled! . . . I seem to have known you much longer than I have, Miss Weston. Is 'Weston' your real name or a professional one?"

"My real name," she said.

"And—and 'Meenie'?"

" 'Meenie' is real, too."

They had reached the step, but they had to wait to be admitted. After they had rung twice, the porter turned in his bed and pulled the cord, and they entered the hall, dim in the blueness of a single burner.

The girl drew off her right glove.

"Good-night, Miss Meenie Weston," said Lingham, facing her.

"Good-night, and—au revoir," she said.

In the glimmer of the lowered gas-jet their gaze dwelt together for a moment; then the softness of her hand fell from him, and she went slowly up the stairs.

When about ten minutes had passed, Lingham stole to the fourth floor too, and tapped.

Her voice reached him faintly.

"It's I," he said. "I'm pushing a note under the door. Can you see it? There's no answer. Good-night."

"Good-night."

She crept forward, a little white-gowned figure

with her hair about her shoulders, and read his message in the candlelight. "For the cab and pocket-money." Two louis slipped from the envelope.

The stairs creaked unmusically as he went down.

She locked her hands over her breast, and listened to every footfall.

"Dear little woman!" murmured Lingham, looking up in the bareness of his room.

## CHAPTER XIII

In the pension de famille dwelt nine girls, and some of them were fair to see. Each had her aims, her joys, her sorrows, and was the heroine of a story; but this is the story of only one girl. Six of the nine studied at Colarossi's in the rue de la Grande Chaumière; two worked at Delècluse's in the rue Notre Dame des Champs; and the other stopped at home and counted the candles, and distributed the towels. And when madame Pigeonneau kept her room, the ninth girl reigned in her stead over the ragoût.

The ninth girl was not unhappy. If appetite is the best sauce, occupation is the best tonic. When she began to understand her duties, she extracted some pleasure from them. If she occasionally left undone things which she ought to have done, she offered compensation by the performance of tasks for which she was not engaged. She made beds. And she made something else, which the students received with acclamation, and which Julie eyed amazed: she made tea. The tea and her singing were such successful contri-

butions to the gaiety of the salon that Colarossi's and Delècluse's furnished two further applicants for board residence within a fortnight. Madame Pigeonneau was unable to take them because the house was already full, but none the less she appreciated the advertisement.

In this environment of high thoughts and plain living it was the ninth girl who provided the love interest. His cousin, whom Lingham asked for when he called, was the first to discover whom he came to see; but when she invited him to share the ragoût and he passed the evening in Meenie's presence with eight young women looking on, there was not a boarder in the place who failed to scent a romance. Personally they shunned romance; well-conducted damsels, every student of them, they associated romance with marriage —and no girl who took her art seriously could contemplate domesticity without hysterics. Four of the English girls were even members of the A.M.L., a society founded in the British Museum for the purpose of preserving the feminine student from temptation. The initials signified the "Anti-Matrimonial League." Still, to those whose mission in life was less important than their own, they recognised that romance was not necessarily fatal. Courtship as an entertainment they condoned, and, indeed, approved; se-

cure in the pit, one applauds temerity on the trapeze. Speculation ran high as to Miss Weston's sentiments. The *pensionnaires* who worked at the Académie Delècluse declared that "no signs of spooniness were visible," but among the six at Colarossi's opinion was divided. It is strange that woman is always able to diagnose love fever more readily in a man than in one of her own sex.

So much for the audience. As to Meenie, she was in love, and knew it; Lingham had fallen in love, but was reluctant to acknowledge it yet. He said he liked her very much. He liked to be with her; he was thankful when he found himself alone with her. When his cousin remembered that there was a letter or a photograph upstairs that she wanted to show him, and Meenie and he were left tête-à-tête for five minutes, he counted it unto Georgina for righteousness. It will be seen that Georgina had taken a fancy to Meenie. In a novel she would have been her rival, and either have warned her solemnly that the marriage would ruin his career, or have congratulated them both with a brave smile and shed scalding tears in private. Her actual thoughts were that Miss Weston was very nice, and that it was a great pity Ralph wasn't better off.

Meenie's outdoor exercise was not taken solely

in the company of Julie, nor for the purchase of provisions. She went sometimes for a walk, and by-and-by Lingham learnt the fact, and they wandered about the quarter together. At this stage he knew that he was very fond of her, because a man cannot loiter at the end of a street for half an hour on the chance of a girl coming round the corner and continue to euphemise. Then he inquired sternly what his intentions were; if he didn't mean to propose to her, he was behaving unfairly. He was certainly in no position to marry; if anybody had ever asserted that he would think of taking a wife unto himself on an income of two guineas a week and something over seventy pounds in cash, he would have replied that the prophet had been drinking. His convictions were suddenly deranged; the pictures to which he had aspired allured him no more, and he revelled in impressions that had formerly made him shudder. The Chippendale bookcases, the right editions, the stall when he went to the play, what was it all worth? A man might look back and lament in the midst of Chippendale bookcases! A tiny apartment under the slates, with the girl in his arms, and a manuscript in the press, would be a richer joy. Besides, he would get on. It wasn't reasonable—in his present mood—to suppose that public recognition

would never come to him. They could be patient; they could economise until he hit the popular taste. Perhaps the novel that was due in the spring would be a pecuniary success? He might make several hundred pounds by it—for that matter, he might make a great deal more. Other writers managed to please the critics and the public, too: why shouldn't he? And he might attempt a comedy. Her suggestion of his dramatising *Angela Brown, Publisher,* had taken root in his mind, and vaguely he saw a scenario. Without the post on *The Other Side,* he told himself that he would not have dared to rush into matrimony, but although the salary would not pay their expenses, it would eke out the money in hand until a further sum came in.

Perhaps she did not like him enough? She was grateful to him; there was a touch of sentiment in her gratitude, he was sure; but she might consider that even employment without anxieties was preferable to a reckless marriage. It would be delicious irony to have his own familiar arguments turned against him! A pair of blue eyes had sent his theories all spinning in the air; let the lips prate prudence, and the situation would be complete. How he had always ridiculed the idea of love in a cottage, loathed it, sickened at it! He knew that cottage; several of his acquaint-

ances had taken it, and asked him to dinner. It was furnished conspicuously with Aspinall and the wedding presents. The train service was excellent—in the time-table—and you smelt boiled cabbage, and heard the babies crying when you reached the front-door. And yet—well, he did not crave for a baby now, but he would welcome even Aspinall and a suburb as concomitants to Meenie.

When she had been at the pension de famille a little more than a month, he confessed it; not in those words, but in the best phrases that he could find. They were very artless. Realist though he was, he would have hesitated to put such a proposal into one of his books. For this reason, among others, the proposal is omitted from the narrative. He explained his circumstances with perfect candour, and asked her if she would be his wife.

They were on the boulevard Saint-Michel—a poor place to propose in, though a million romances begin and end there. Twilight was falling; the windows of the brasseries and the cafés glowed warmly, and the flower-sellers, and the olive-vendors, and a decorative Arab with a tray of sweets, dodged deftly among the crowd.

"Yes," she said.

The man was seized with regret that he could

not catch her close and kiss her. The girl, who was equally ecstatic, did not feel the need of a physical caress yet. To him the crowd that kept her from his arms became momentarily more obtrusive, more irritating; to her it was impalpable, a dream; only he and she were realities. A hand thrust a posy towards him; a voice pleaded to him to buy a little bouquet for his sweetheart —"six sous seulement." He grasped the blossoms as an augury, and drew her out of the stream of traffic to a table, where they were served with something that she could not taste.

Then he leant towards her and whispered.

She looked at him across the flowers. "It's very wonderful," she said, speaking as if she were in church.

"I was just thinking so too."

"I meant it is wonderful to feel that you care for me."

"*I* meant it is wonderful to feel you're going to be my wife."

"Seize sous, m'sieu," said the waiter briskly. "Merci bien, m'sieu!" He whipped up the salver and bustled.

"I hope I'm not letting you do wrong?" she went on after a silence. "Perhaps one day you'll wish we hadn't met each other."

"You know I shall never do that; it is you who are being rash."

"I?"

"We shall be awfully hard up."

"I have been hard up all my life."

"We may rise to an attic."

"I'll make it pretty if we do! We'll have a flower-pot and a bird-cage in the window."

"A bird would drive me mad when I'm at work; I have a dreadful temper."

"So have I—furious!"

"You? You're an angel!"

She laughed softly. "You don't know me yet. Wait till you find me out."

The prospect thrilled him; his heart swelled at it. He clasped her hand furtively, with an eye on the waiter's back.

"Meenie!"

"Well?"

"Tell me my name."

"Mr. Lingham."

"I've warned you what my temper is like."

"Then 'Ralph'—because I'm frightened."

"Meenie!"

"Yes?"

"Nothing—I wanted to say 'Meenie,' that's all. . . . Meenie, I shan't be able to write a line

to-night; can't you get away and go out with me?"

"Oh, I can't again this evening!" she exclaimed. "How could I? You might come there instead—if you want to see me very much."

"That's not so good; I hate those gawky girls sitting about the room and listening to every word I say to you. Still, I suppose I must put up with them a little longer. You will arrange to leave soon, won't you? When will you marry me, Meenie?"

"Some day," she murmured, "if we don't grow wise."

"Will you marry me next week?"

"Next week?" She played with the teaspoon, and her bosom rose.

"Monsieur ees not reading ze *Figaro?*" A waiter, proud of his English, pointed to the journal on the table.

"No," said Lingham impatiently, "no, take it!" He leant closer to her. "Why should we wait?" he urged. "Poor people ought to be practical. We shall have seventeen hundred and fifty francs next week; the week after there won't be so much. To delay would be sheer improvidence. The prudent course is to marry at once."

A clock brought her down to earth.

"I must go," she said, starting. "I had for-

gotten all about the time; madame Pigeonneau'll wonder where I am. Then you will come to-night?"

"Yes," he said, "I shall come, of course; but I'm going to the end of the street with you now. You needn't run, Cinderella; look, your coach is at the door!"

"We can't afford it, Prince," she smiled.

He found the plural number enchanting, but he drove her to the corner in spite of the remonstrance. The crowd on the pavement would have retarded her—and out of view in the cab, there was no one in the way.

## CHAPTER XIV

THE earliest joy that first love yields a girl is the sense of being mastered. The second is the revelation of her own power. This astonishes her; the god kneels, and the throne is hers. At the beginning she is a little breathless, a little bewildered; she does not realise herself in the aspect that she wears to him. She discovers that she possesses a force that she knew nothing about: she intoxicates. She has intoxicated nobody hitherto; neither her brothers, to whom she has been sexless, nor her sisters, who have always told her that she might be pretty if her nose weren't so long. It startles her to find that the hands that cut the bread-and-butter can make a man tremble when they touch him; that the hair that she has brushed and coiled impassively all her life holds a shiver in every thread. She has scrutinised her features night and morning for years, yet her lover's eyes reflect a magic in her face that the mirror has not shown. She wonders, she experiments, she exults. His emotions surprise her as the bits of paper attracted by the

sealing-wax surprise a child; she finds it lovely to see them jump. Very soon she accepts divinity as a birthright; and her family, to whom she is still mortal, gape.

Meenie's engagement to Lingham differed from most engagements, only inasmuch as it was briefer. Of course, she consented to marry him in the following week, and meanwhile they hunted for a place to live in. As an engaged man he found that the evening in the salon, with eight pairs of eyes studying his symptoms, had its awkwardness. It was embarrassing to the fiancée too; so she obtained permission to go out every afternoon now, and the number of slatternly landladies that they contrived to interview on these afternoons was highly creditable. It had promised to be the easiest thing in the world to choose a lodging, but the adjectives in advertisements were so misleading. For "coquettish" both conceived a quite violent hatred; the "coquettish rooms," that proved to be dirty beyond expression, were as numerous as the half-dressed *propriétaires*.

Yet, though they were sometimes tired and often disappointed, it was not devoid of excitement to mount the high staircases together and conjecture what would be revealed at the top; not without its tremors to inspect side by side the

apartments where they might soon lie heart to heart. It was not conventional—it was marriage *à la vie de bohème*—but the sense of intimacy was delicious. They wanted at a moderate rental, a couple of rooms prettily furnished, with a piano, and attendance, and a pleasant view. Who should seek less? Yet it began to seem as if they must decide between a flat, with a servant to sleep out, and a pension de famille. And the one was expensive; the other distasteful.

Their honeymoon was to be spent in Paris. From the Consulate they intended to drive straight home. Lingham had suggested a fortnight in the country, but the girl was obdurate. "You have been extravagant enough," she said; "when we are married we must begin as we mean to go on." They were eager in these circumstances to make their choice speedily, so that the place might look cosy when they entered. The man wanted his books unpacked, and Meenie had visions of flowers and her music.

At last they stumbled on a veritable bargain over a shop in the rue Poncelet. The piano merely needed tuning, and the woman was not only cheerful, but—for a Paris landlady—clean. She offered them two rooms for ninety francs a week, including food and wine. They could see potentialities in those rooms; when they had "put

their things about" all would be well. She was ready to provide a second table for monsieur to write at, and expressed the conviction that madame would find her cooking phenomenal. Nobody could say more. Lingham paid madame Goigoux a deposit on the spot, and they descended the stairs jubilantly.

Thenceforward they made daily pilgrimages to the rue Poncelet. On Monday they enshrined a plant, and on Tuesday, in the Ternes, they picked up some bookshelves. Georgina was a very good friend to them, and her ideas on the subject of a wedding present were so exuberant that they required restraining. He had invited her to breakfast with them at a restaurant after the ceremony, but in the end it was settled that he should give a little dinner, instead, the day before; and previous to the dinner they imparted to their abode the finishing touches.

They had arrived with their trunks. It was almost as if they were man and wife already as the luggage was dumped into the salon, and they knelt over their belongings on the same carpet. The chest that held the books was difficult to open, but when the lid was wrenched off, and, between the brown paper, the volumes showed their alluring backs, the girl's fair head dipped to the contents as blithely as a duck's to the stream.

And she was not dilatory with a duster. They arranged their library in four fascinating rows. Then Meenie took out the photographs of her parents, which she put on the mantelshelf, and one of herself at the age of twelve, which Lingham immediately annexed, and vowed must stand nowhere but on the second table. For the adornment of the walls madame Goigoux had deposited on the floor a stack of unframed canvases that has been the property of a former lodger, and these they pounced on, to communicate to the ensemble a dash of colour, a suggestion of the studio, that would lift it into the ideal.

They examined the Italian models and the dancing-girls together, a committee of two, cheek by cheek. One dancing-girl recurred so often that they drew inferences, and some of the Académies Lingham promptly dropped, before the cheek approached, for consideration after they were married. He balanced himself on a flight of steps, and Meenie stood at the foot with a critical eye, and her hand full of tacks. As often as she held one up to him he kissed her fingers, at the risk of breaking his neck, and this made the process of picture-hanging unnecessarily slow. However, when their selections were all displayed to the best advantage, the improvement was undeniable. With the sketches,

and the books, and the plant blooming in the window, the little interior was inviting enough. They surveyed the result of their labours with unmixed approval, and as to madame Goigoux, who returned to see how they were getting on, she waxed so enthusiastic that they began to fear that she might raise the rent.

But their complacence was as nothing compared with their rapture in opening the door the next evening. Welcome was in the air. The world was hidden by the curtains, lamp-light shone on the bulbous gold of the champagne-bottle, and glasses twinkled on the cloth. The girl unpinned her hat; his emotion was infinite; they had come to stay; she lived with him here—incredible! "Let me take off your jacket," he begged. It was thrilling to divest her of it, to draw off her gloves, and, for the first time, to have her nestle in his arms in the atmosphere of home. She gathered up the things and tripped to the bedroom. He wandered restlessly, longing for her to return. The dinner had been ordered from a restaurant close by, and presently madame Goigoux came in with the soup. He called, and his wife answered. O bounteous hour, fruitful in surprises! To call and to hear one's wife answer! The strange joy shook him. A moment later she reappeared, and, lo! the fairy god-

mother had been with her, and she was transfigured, dazzling in a white silk frock. He caught his breath.

"I couldn't help it." She blushed. "Our wedding day! I wanted to look nice."

His eyes devoured her. Her own drooped before them, but her bosom was triumphant.

"You look beautiful," he murmured; "you look taller. How did I find the courage to propose to you?" He offered his arm. "Mrs. Lingham, may I take you down?"

They went to the table. The cork popped a salute, and they moved the lamp that they might see each other better.

"Say that again," she commanded; "I liked it."

"Say what? That you are beautiful?"

"No, no; my new name."

So he repeated it: "Mrs. Lingham! But 'Meenie' vibrates to me much more."

"Oh, 'Meenie' is so old to *me*."

He foamed her glass afresh. "I propose the health of the bride and bridegroom! I say from my heart that the bride is divine. What she saw in the bridegroom Heaven knows, *I* don't! But utterly unworthy of her as he is——"

"No, no!" she cried.

"In spite of unseemly interruptions, I say that utterly unworthy of her as he is——"

"He isn't!"

"I still thank God he won her! I ask you to drink to their happiness, darling."

They clinked their glasses with his arm about her waist; and madame Goigoux came back with the fish.

Of a truth madame Goigoux was rather a nuisance, for the courses seemed so many, and their appetite was so small. By the time the entrée was reached the carefully considered dinner became as perfunctory as a banquet in a play; everything looked very good; there was the semblance of feasting; but as for the banqueters' appreciation of the viands, that was the merest show. For all its flavour to the bride the bird might have been created by the property master, and if the groom had obeyed half the impulses that seized him to snatch her hands from her knife and fork, the dinner would never have been finished at all.

However, he was patient, and held them when the cloth was cleared. Butterfly-kisses are the quiver of a girl's eyelashes on her lover's face. She made him smoke, saying that she would not be treated as if she were a visitor. She wondered if he wanted to put on his slippers, but she didn't like to ask him that, although she was sure that boots worn all day must be extremely painful.

By-and-by he begged her to sing, and opened the piano. He stood there to turn the leaves for her, but she would not let him do it, and banished him to the arm-chair. Her voice had never sounded so intense to him, and she had never sung so badly. The lover and the artist both responded to it, and passionately he envied a composer's power of communicating in a line more than an author could express in a thousand words.

She rose, and leant by the window. He saw that she did not wish to speak. The street was sinking into silence; the little shops across the way slept behind their shutters. She looked up at the sky, remembering vaguely many crises in which she had watched the stars—and the stars were still unchanged! By no transition her thoughts reverted to her mother; and the husband behind her became a strange man.

## CHAPTER XV

THE popular imagination has been so much impressed by facile pictures of a clown grinning through a horse-collar with tears in his eyes that many people have come to regard the career of clown as uniquely poignant. But there are fewer clowns than journalists, and while the sorrowing clown must cut capers with his legs, the stricken journalist must be nimble with his mind, which is far more difficult, and doubly cruel. Though the screams of a wife in agony shake his pen, he mustn't be late with his leader. A coffin may lie in the silent house, but the Paper will go to press at the usual hour. If the graveyard has numbed him in body and brain, he must hammer out that column of Notes and Comments before the pillar-box is cleared. In grief or in joy, on a sick-bed, or on a honeymoon, the first duty of a journalist is to post his copy in time; and after breakfast on the morrow Lingham had to wrestle with his causerie, though he had never attacked it with more reluctance.

Meenie watched her lord with reverent eyes,

and when he bit the penholder and stared disconsolately at the ceiling, her heart ached for him. In the circumstances it was not to be expected that he would progress very rapidly, and there were several interludes of the David and Dora type. After luncheon they went to the Boulevard, and bought *The Daily Chronicle* and a lot of French newspapers—it surprised her to find what a lot of French newspapers he had to skim—and in the evening they witnessed a dreary show at Olympia.

The cooking of madame Goigoux was not "phenomenal," but it was satisfactory, and they had no reason to complain of their arrangement as the days passed. By degrees the sense of strangeness wore from the perpetual tête-à-tête; the man found it possible to write without turning his head every other minute to see if his wife looked comfortable, and Meenie was able to appreciate more of their library than the titles.

Of course, she appreciated nothing so warmly as Lingham's copy for *The Other Side*. That was devotion. It savoured of the miraculous to her when he wrote, "The incident reminds one of"—an anecdote that was much brighter than the incident itself, and threw in an epigram which somebody who died a hundred years ago seemed to have made on purpose to fit the situation.

What if the paragraph did take an hour and a half to produce? She could not have done it herself in a lifetime. Her opportunities while he worked occurred when he was doubtful of the epigram; she could run to the shelves and verify it for him. And when she read: "But those behind the scenes are smiling at the rumour," she was sure that the Editor must think that his correspondent was a member of the smartest clubs and an habitué of all the green-rooms.

When the new year was a fortnight old, Lingham began seriously to consider the dramatisation of *Angela Brown, Publisher*. The project was infinitely more fascinating to her than his journalism, for it had been born of her suggestion; and, better still, they could discuss the scenario together.

It was discussed for many days. More than once the lamp died out while they sat talking over the difficulties, and they were plunged in darkness. It was pathetic to realise how many of the best scenes in the book must be sacrificed for dramatic form, and dizzying to discover that he was compelled to lay a whole act in Angela's office.

"I don't know how to bring anybody in there after the hero has gone," he complained—"and I'm bound to show that office. What does every-

body come for?—the whole cast can't have written novels. . . . Of course, nine-tenths of the dialogue about literary life must be cut out for the theatre. I must just explain how Angela comes to have the business, and what kind of girl she is, and then stick to the story."

"It might—no, that wouldn't do!" said Meenie.

"What were you going to say?"

"I was going to say it might be her birthday; that's why the others come."

"Well, she has a home I suppose? she wouldn't give a party in her office."

"No, I thought of that as I spoke; her birthday is no good. Supposing—no, that wouldn't do either!"

He pulled at his pipe, and mused heavily.

"Well, it's quite certain that *some* way must be found to bring people in there!" he said at last in a slightly injured tone. "She and the hero can't jaw over his infernal manuscript for a whole act. Wait, wait, wait! I've got it, I've got it! Don't talk to me—I've got it, and it'll go!"

And so forth. There were evenings when they gazed at each other despairingly, and others when the wits of both were nimble and obstacles fell like ninepins. She could not write three lines—she tried once for fun—but occasionally, as she

came to have an inkling of construction, she would vault a hedge, or dart to a hole in it, more quickly than he.

Nevertheless he had an eye for essentials. Staggering as the task was at times, he found he was accomplishing a scenario that looked workmanlike with greater speed than he would have expected of himself, considering the toil and tribulation inflicted by *The Other Side*. It was the scenario—the skeleton of the thing—that was his chief anxiety; of his dialogue he was not much afraid. He worked so indefatigably that a bride less interested in his pursuits might have felt neglected. The girl told him once that a pen was never out of his hand except when he was rustling the daily supply of French newspapers. He drew her close, and answered, "Because I want to make money for Meenie!" But he took her to the Palais de Glace that night, not quite sure that he hadn't been a brute.

When its last bone was fitted and polished, the skeleton was packed up; and its creator trembled for it as he had not trembled yet, for it was going to London to be judged by an expert. And he had grown to love the skeleton. He addressed it to "Spencer Parlett, Esqre.," and enclosed a letter saying that he wanted to hear the truth.

Let it be understood that Spencer Parlett was

a popular dramatic author, and it is redundant to add that he was a friend, for popular dramatic authors do not read manuscripts to oblige acquaintances. He was, as a matter of fact, Lingham's familiar friend, and one of the small minority who believed him to be a novelist of uncommon power. The belief was older than the friendship. Though they had never collaborated, Lingham had learnt more of stagecraft from their intimacy than he had suspected until the last few weeks; and he had learnt enough to know the folly of proceeding further with the structure if the framework was malformed. But again, he loved the skeleton: he awaited the reply with nervousness.

It came four evenings later. Meenie tiptoed to read it over his shoulder, but it was scrawled in pencil, and Parlett wrote a devilish hand. Lingham read aloud—slowly, and muttered criticisms which were not in the note. Fully twenty minutes had gone by before he grasped the sense of the whole, and even then there remained one or two words at which he could only guess:

"My dear Benedict,

"How is it possible that people possessed of such magnificence in Fiction can envy me my humble cottage on the Stage? Sharper than a

serpent's tooth it is to have a competitory pal. So I have nursed a viper on my hearth only that he may pluck the fees from a struggling playwright's purse? Go ahead, dear boy—I think it ought to come out excellently.

"Yours ever,

"S. P."

"He's a very good chap," observed Lingham, glowing. " 'Excellently,' eh? He couldn't say much more, could he? I'm very fond of Parlett. Meenie, if this makes our fortune, it will be your doing; I should never have started it but for you. Who knows? it may be a colossal success; we might make——" His brain swam. "Parlett has made about thirty thousand pounds out of *The Power of the Purse* since it was written. A big success in the theatre is an income for life. Oh, my dear, I should love to get you swagger frocks, and diamonds, and buy you a carriage! You would look so fetching in a victoria."

"Goose!" she said, seeing herself in it. "What is Parlett like? Is he young? How jolly it must be to meet famous people!"

"I don't meet many. Young? Well, he isn't so young as he was, or as he feels. He has done a lot of things in collaboration, you know, and when he first worked with other men he always

used to make 'the old man' in his comedies fifty —an enfeebled dotard of fifty. Then, as time went on, Parlett began to resent it when a collaborator wrote, 'an old man—50.' He used to say, Not fifty, my dear fellow—fifty is ridiculous! Let us make him fifty-five.' And for awhile 'the old man' in Parlett's comedies was always fifty-five. But everything is relative—today he always pleads for him to be sixty. It's becoming very difficult for his collaborators. He says, 'In my plays fifty is the heyday—my favourite age. Very soon the gallant boy of fifty will be my hero.' "

He wrote the first line of the dialogue the next morning; after the encouragement that he had received, how could he hesitate? For all that, he recognised that the avocation had its risk; no matter how good the piece might prove, it would be a property for which he had to find a market, whereas if he sat down to a novel, instead, he would be producing something for which his market was already made. They had often discussed the point, and once during the morning he turned to her with it again.

"It's a slower job than I thought it would be," he exclaimed. "*I* can't write at the Parlett rate. I believe I'm mad, after all, to devote months to an experiment. Suppose the time is thrown

away—suppose I never get the thing accepted? I'm not in a position to try my hand at a new game."

He did not know it, but beneath the irritation in his voice there was the plaintive ring of one who hopes he will be contradicted. Instinct set her reply in the right key.

"The experiment has been made," she said promptly. "We never feared for your dialogue, only for your construction. That is done—and praised."

He looked happier; the irritation of his tone was less marked.

"Praise by somebody who hasn't got a theatre," he argued. "Parlett's praise won't put the piece on the stage when it's finished. If I were getting ninety francs a week from the paper I wouldn't mind, but we're eating up our capital. How long will it last? I never could do arithmetic."

"Ages!" she returned. "And your book will be out directly; there will be more money to come from that."

"It mayn't be much, though, and it mayn't come in time."

"Some of it," she persisted, "is bound to come in time. There are your Continental rights."

He smiled. "You're a very delightful lit-

tle business woman! You remember, do you?"

"Oh, I remember! I ask for information, like Rosa Dartle, and when it's given I don't forget. Besides"—she leant over him with a masterstroke—"you *would* be wasting time if you put the comedy aside now. Your head is full of it, and you could no more think out a plot for a new novel while your brain is bubbling with something else than *I* could. You would do just nothing!"

The truth of this settled the doubt once and for all, and he plunged into the work chin-deep. They paid madame Goigoux a franc a week extra, because sometimes he burnt the lamp half the night now. Happy amendments often flashed on him after he was in bed, and then at breakfast he sat tortured, straining to recall them, and jumped when a spoon clinked. He hooked a pencil and pad on the wall over his pillow, and would heave in the dark and scratch memoranda just as she was falling asleep. Once, when she woke she crept from the bedroom to see a bowed back, and wild hair, and a clock pointing to the hour of five. And behold the wise woman! She did not say, "Do you know the time, dear?" She noted that the pen flew fast, and, holding her breath, stole back so cautiously that he never guessed that he had been overlooked. Verily when an author can approve his wife she was deserving of a better fate!

## CHAPTER XVI

THE winter passed, and, on the boulevards, the buds and the chairs came out while he worked at the comedy. And in the blaze of summer he was still scribbling and declaiming at the second table, for a dramatist can no more write dialogue in silence than an actor can study a part sitting down. Parlett had returned the scenario at the end of February; when the postman delivered to the author two type-written copies of the piece the end of July was near. Very attractive the four acts looked with their red-ruled margins and their pink bows. It was almost as pleasant to toy with them as it had been in April to receive the six free copies of the novel "Dedicated to my Wife." What playwright in his novitiate would have demurred when the girl he thought prettiest declared that the carbon copy of *Angela Brown, Publisher,* must be bound in cloth for her own shelf? Not Lingham, though it had been ordered lest the other should go astray in its adventures.

They commenced briskly. The piece was submitted to the Pall Mall Theatre—where the act-

or-manager's wife was the leading lady—and after a week of comparative idleness, Ralph began to think about another book. The reviews of the last were as excellent as usual. Often when Meenie had torn open the exciting green wrappers and devoured the cuttings that were enclosed, there seemed to her a touch of unreality in the situation; she contemplated his pecuniary position in amaze. "Mr. Lingham" in the criticisms sounded so successful, so secure; he sounded so aloof from the herd that struggled. If she had read criticisms of his work before she met him, in how different an environment she would have pictured "Mr. Lingham"! Surely the critics themselves would gasp to learn what his capital was? Of a certainty the beginners would gasp who sent piteous letters to him, detailing their hardships and beseeching loans. Hoary-headed impostors, many of these "beginners"—their phrases smelt of the tap-room; others, in truth, despairing lads yielding to an impulse, blushing as they wrote. Some of the letters were horrible to read; they made her cry.

His gossip for the paper was now at its best. At the onset it had been a trifle rigid, though never so bad as he had thought it. During the period of his immersion in the comedy it had become a shade careless; to-day he was beyond

question worth his salary—so there was no moral to be adduced from the thing that happened. He was dismissed. He was to be supplanted by the proprietor's nephew, for whom the proprietor's daughter felt a more than cousinly interest. Of course, Ralph did not hear that; he merely received a courteous and vague note. An editor "regrets" mechanically; he "regrets" that he cannot make use of a story that he does not want; he "regrets" that the manuscript that he has kept for a year has not appeared yet, when he apprises the contributor that it will be paid for on the thirtieth day of the second month after publication; and the Editor of *The Other Side* "regretted" to inform Mr. Lingham that arrangements were being made which would prevent their retaining his services later than the 3rd proximo.

The loss of two guineas a week could scarcely have been a greater shock to anybody. The bolt fell from the blue of August, and now the correspondent's capital was about thirty-five pounds. He had often had considerably less and esteemed himself well provided for; but then he had been a bachelor. Thirty-five pounds, a comedy likely to be rejected at the Pall Mall, and an inchoate novel in his head. And he had a wife to keep! He smoked hard.

"How long do you reckon the novel will take to write?" she asked, rallying.

"Ten months, I'm afraid—I've never been able to write one more quickly yet. Of course, if the last has sold decently we can jog along for ten months—there will be royalties to come to us in October. But if it hasn't, I don't see at the moment what we are going to do. It evidently hasn't been a boom. . . . Still, we won't howl yet. I must tear the plot out as soon as I can, and we'll listen to the flattering tale of hope. . . . Well, I suppose we had better go back to London, eh, pard—nobody wants us here?"

"There seems nothing to stay for," she assented slowly. Till then she had not recognised the fact, and the crash reverberated.

"Nothing. Besides in London I can bustle about *Angela*—and save the difference between the postage rates. A penny saved is something—proverbial."

"Yes, of course," she said. "Now that the play is done, you ought to be on the spot. And you might get on another paper there."

"I don't think there is much chance of that. *The Other Side* was a sheer fluke. I might make the attempt, but you could throw a net in Fleet Street and catch a haul of better journalists than

I am with your eyes shut; and all in deep waters."

"We shall manage," she said. "As soon as we get back I shall try for a town engagement. If I get thirty shillings a week, it will be a help."

Lingham burnt his fingers with a match. "You will what?" he exclaimed. "Good God! I wouldn't let you go on the stage again for any money that could be named. No, my love; *I'll* find the bread and butter, thank you, if I have to kill an editor to do it. The action would be thrice blessed. If I were a potentate I would send out emissaries to collect editors, and then I'd make a bonfire of them in my park."

"If I could get thirty shillings a week in town, look what it would mean to us!" she persisted. "There are heaps of married women in the chorus, Ralph—and nice women, too."

"Yes, I daresay. I've no doubt there are plenty of women on the stage whose husbands are content never to do a stroke of work. Live on the wives' salaries. *I'm* not in that galley. Don't be silly, baby. At the worst I'll go to Alport and ask him to advance fifty pounds on the first two chapters. Where there's a wife, there's a way. Thank goodness there are only two of us to think about!"

After this they bought *The Daily Telegraph*

every evening, and scanned the columns headed "Board & Apartments To Let." The heat was intense now, and though they were sorry to say good-bye to Paris, they were not so acutely sorry as they would have been three months earlier. As the jar of the news subsided, they regained their cheerfulness. Only madame Goigoux was inconsolable. She protested that she should never forget them; and if they ever wanted the rooms again—"C'est que ce me rendrait contente —mais contente!" But one line, and they should be ready; yes, even though they were let to "un avantage incroyable!"

When their plans crystallised, they decided to go into a boarding-house for a few days while they looked for lodgings. On the evening before they crossed they spent ten francs. They could not afford it, but it was their last night in Paris; and they would store another memory! They went to the Ambassadeurs, and drank iced sirops under the trees; and then they took their farewell stroll along the Boulevard, and syphons made music for them again outside the Café de la Paix. But who admits that he bids farewell to Paris? "We shall often come back," they said, as they sat there; "very likely we shall run over soon." And then, as they passed the shining courtyard of the Grand, "Perhaps *Angela*

will make thousands for us; we may come over in the spring, and stay at the Grand!"

It was hot in London, too, when they arrived, though cooler than it had been in Paris. After the Swiss youth had handed round the "coffee," they left the boarding-house and walked down Bedford Place. The moon looked the same as it had looked the night before. They would have felt less sad if it had looked different. They were very lonely in the long, gaunt streets. They had come home, but they were "homesick." A regret which each strove to hide from the other filled the man with forebodings, and brought a lump to the girl's throat. How colourless everything was! She had noticed it in the drive from Victoria. The grim frontages, the dreary faces of the people moving in the half-lit streets reminded her of the comments of Le Beau. Dear little salon in the rue Poncelet! There would be no lamp in it to-night; it was standing empty and dark.

At the dressing table of the bedroom it was almost impossible for Lingham to work; and as time pressed, they made haste to seek more permanent quarters. The gentility of the advertisers in *The Daily Telegraph,* which forbade them to state their terms, intensified the difficulty of discovering suitable lodgings at a satisfactory

rent, and "moderate" in London proved to be quite as deceptive as "coquettish" had been in Paris. He and Meenie had agreed that they would be wise to ring bells within walking distance, instead of paying fares to make inquiries in Clapham, and Shepherd's Bush; and eventually they rang one in Gower Street.

The arrangement proposed here was on much the same lines as the one they had had with madame Goigoux, only they were to take their meals in the landlady's room. They did not object to the suggestion at all, for it would avert the rattling of cutlery over Lingham while he was trying to write. She was a rather pretty little brunette, smartly dressed, and perhaps just touched with rouge. They understood her name to be Kisch, but she spelt it Kis. She was an Hungarian. Her English, though it lacked adverbs, was fluent, and she explained, with animation, that she would accept three pounds ten a week for apartments, board included, because she was trying to dispose of the business and wanted to display a full house.

They moved in at once, and occupied two communicating rooms on the first floor. Certainly the construction was ridiculous; the sitting-room was so small that they had to squeeze round the table; while the bedroom, overlooking back gar-

dens, was as wide as the house, with three long windows. But for Gower Street the terms were extremely low.

When they went down to dinner on the first evening they found Mrs. Kis in a low-necked gown—dispensing the whiting—and a miniature man, whom they seemed to be viewing through the wrong end of opera-glasses, prepared to take her to the theatre. His name was Friedman, they learnt; and on the morrow Mrs. Kis confided to Meenie that she was going to be married to him, and that his parents, who lived in Hamburg, thought it very wrong for him to be lodging here in the meanwhile. She hoped, with appealing eyes, that Meenie did not think so too—the poor fellow was a stranger in London, and she was "so dreadful sorry for him!" Emmie, the housemaid, subsequently implied a different story, but one should never listen to the gossip of servants.

The day after the incoming Ralph called on his publishers, to ascertain what sum he was likely to receive the following month. To his dismay he learnt that the sale of the book had so much disappointed the firm that they were out of pocket by the hundred pounds that had been paid to him on account. The fate of the piece at the Pall Mall was therefore an urgent matter, and

as soon as he returned he wrote to the manager giving him the new address, and inquiring if he had had time to read it yet. The question remained unanswered, but the next afternoon the four attractive acts with pink bows came back. "Evidently," said Meenie, "he has *not* read them!" She packed them up again without loss of time, and they were despatched to the Sovereignty.

There was a little furrow on the girl's brow that night when she went down to dinner, and the man looked thoughtful. Mrs. Kis was decked with flowers which Mr. Friedman had sent home to console her for his detention in the City; and she told them, in her pretty, artless way, that her claret came from a friend in the trade and she could let them have it at a shilling a bottle if they liked, but that they mustn't mention the price they were paying, because she charged her lover one-and-ninepence. After dinner Ralph drove a lazy pen.

The circumstances were not favourable to the invention of a plot. The knowledge that they would have spent their last pound in about six weeks, unless something unexpected happened, was not stimulating to the imagination. The opening chapter of the indeterminate novel was progressing by such painful steps that he could

not help dwelling more on the comedy that was finished than on the task that had to be done. He had never begun a story hitherto until the scheme was clear in his mind; and to make people talk before he was certain what rôles they were going to play affrighted him. From Bedford Place he had forwarded Meenie's copy of *Angela Brown* to Parlett, and he was eager to have his opinion of it now that the manuscript was complete. The following morning he betook himself to his friend's to be encouraged.

## CHAPTER XVII

PARLETT lived in Belsize Avenue. He had made a fortune by his plays, and had spent it; to-day he was making a large income, and spent that. His victoria was as smart a little carriage as could be built; his horses were the envy of his neighbours, and his coachman did such credit to the livery that, though he always failed to find the stage-doors, and met remonstrance by the retort that he had been "used to driving in Belgravia," the dramatist hadn't the courage to discharge him.

The house-servants were all women; and so trim and neat were they, so immaculately was the silver kept, and so blooming were the window-boxes, that no stranger would have believed it to be a bachelor's residence. When the parlour-maid admitted Ralph, she exclaimed:

"Oh, Mr. Lingham, sir, you *are* a stranger! Master's in the study being shaved. He'll be so pleased you've come."

"How is he, Annie?" he asked.

She shook her cap dolefully. "Dr. Hutton's

in there; he calls just the same, sir. Master's been very bad lately."

Parlett was seated in a chair, with a towel round his neck; and while the hairdresser's assistant trimmed his beard, the medical man was listening sympathetically to an account of his dyspepsia. He had listened to it once or twice a week for ten years. At Lingham's entrance he looked relieved. The playwright, tendering a languid hand, which contrasted oddly with the pleasure in his eyes, began to put questions. He had a habit of referring to intimate matters before strangers as freely as the lady who could not regard a servant as a man admitted the flunkey to her bathroom; some of his inquiries, especially those that he made after the doctor had taken his departure, were discomposing.

However, he thought well of *Angela Brown, Publisher,* and that was a huge relief.

"What have you done with it?" he asked.

"It's at the Sovereignty now; it came back from the Pall Mall the other day. Do you think I shall place it?"

"Ask me another!" said the man of experience. "What's the good of writing a play without a commission, anyhow? All these theatres have got their arrangements made for two or three years ahead. You want to be in the *swim* to

place a play." One of his mannerisms was to emphasise words in falsetto. "If you aren't in the swim you've got to dodge about, and find out where there's a hitch, and jump in where there's a failure. You can't place a play as you can a novel, through the post. . . . Good-bye, Sweeny Tod." The barber went out, grinning.

"What did you advise me to write it for, then?" said Lingham.

"Oh, don't be a fool!" replied Parlett. "If I had choked you off, what would you have said? You would always have *reproached* me. You would have said, 'It might have been a great success, and you wouldn't let me write it.' "

"Rot," returned Lingham sourly. "Well, how are you?"

"Swollen," said Parlett. He banged himself in the stomach. "As soon as I eat I get big, big! Look at my waistcoat—I can't get a finger under it. It hung on me when I came down this morning. Nobody knows what I suffer; my life is a curse. I've a comic opera to deliver directly, and not half of it's done. The company is engaged! the composer is waiting for the lyrics! and I can't write—I can't *think!* How can I work when I'm in pain all day? You don't suffer from dyspepsia, do you?"

Lingham shook his head. "Not from that."

Parlett looked disappointed. "I don't know," he said with a groan, "I don't know what the end will be. I see nothing *before* me. When a man's health is gone he's ruined. I shall die in the workhouse. My God! I shall die in the workhouse. There's nothing to smile at! Here's a bill for—for five pounds come in; I shall never *make* five pounds again. It's a very serious state of things, boy! It's all right for *you;* your expenses aren't like mine. I paid Bird a hundred pounds yesterday. It's a lot of money."

"What Bird? Your collaborator?"

"Yes, the piece I did with him is running in New York now; I got a draft for two hundred the other day for fees. I paid Bird a hundred pounds yesterday."

"You mean that his work paid him! In other words, you and he have been having a jolly good week together."

"I paid Bird a hundred pounds yesterday," insisted Parlett, sunk in gloom. "A hundred pounds is a lot of money. It's all right for *you;* yours is an ideal life."

Lingham did not speak.

"An ideal life. In nice lodgings, with a little wife to talk to in the evening—*beautiful! bohemian! I* can't afford to marry. I see nobody, I go nowhere; I haven't been to the Café Royal

for a month. As soon as I eat I get big, big!" From the falsetto his voice dropped to a deep declamatory pathos. "I sit here alone at night, Ralph, in this great silent house, with the wind wa-a-a-iling in the chimney, and I think that I would give all my miserable life to know, but for one hour, the joys of health and love." His arm, extended in a dramatic gesture, remained outstretched; it was evident that his words had recalled a pleasanter theme to his mind. A smile lit his face; in an instant he was a lad—eager, delightful. "Let me read you a lyric I've written for the opera!" he exclaimed, bustling. "O joy of love, O love avowed'—I want to hear what you think."

He showered manuscripts all over the desk, but could not find the one he was seeking. The parlourmaid, and then a lady stenographer, were summoned to hunt for it, and at last it was found in a pocket in his bedroom.

Like Lingham he was passionately fond of music, but had neither a musical ear, nor a note in his voice. He chanted the lyric in a discordant quaver which he fondly believed to be the composer's setting.

When he finished he raised questioning eyes.

"The lines are very pretty indeed," said Lingham. "How about the dialogue; is that good?"

"'O joy of love, O love avowed'—see how they open the mouth! Wait a minute. I must read you my patriotic song. I haven't done the second verse yet; this is the first:

"'We have sung to the peril and pluck of the tar,
And we've toasted our Tommy in red,
But it's women who make them the men that they are,
And now here's to our women instead!
Oh, it's well that old England should ring with a lay

To the heroes who carry her guns,
But let's gather a spray of the laurel and bay
For the women who give her the sons!'

"Now comes the refrain:

"'For the women of England,
And all the land!
To the women of England,
Our hat in hand!
For they're loyal and they're game,
And they build their boys the same;
It's our women make the little island grand.'"

"I don't like 'Our hat in hand,'" said Lingham.

Parlett, who was red in the face, for he had imagined himself the baritone and been acting the song, as well as shouting it, made a cross against the line. The almost childish humility with which he accepted anybody's criticism of his

work and his faults was one of his most lovable traits.

"It isn't good," he said, "but I couldn't find a better rhyme to 'land' and 'grand.' I think that ought to be an encore, eh? The women will like that. 'It's our women make the little island grand!' " he shouted again.

"*I* had an idea for a lyric the other day; only I don't write comic operas. The heroine's sweetheart is a sailor, and she sings to one of those spiral shells:

" 'O silver shell from the something shore,
With the roar of the sea inside you.'

"She holds it to her ear, and wonders how her gallant William fares and whether there's a storm. You know!"

"It would look rather as if she'd got an ear-trumpet up, wouldn't it?" said Parlett doubtfully. "How do you like my title, *A Ring o' Roses?* I use the nursery rhyme:

" 'A ring, a ring o' roses,
A pocketful o' posies,
Atishoo! Atishoo!
We all fall down.'

All the girls fall into the pages' arms. That's going to be a big number. Vanderhoff has got

some new effect in the orchestra for the sneeze."

"Where is this masterpiece to be produced?"

"Liverpool, my boy, in November—if I ever get through. Well, tell me about yourself. When am I going to see your wife?"

"Come to see us as soon as you can."

"I never go *out*," cried Parlett; "I never have *time* to go out! I haven't seen my horses for a week; they're eating their heads off. That damned coachman has just had the stables done up, too; I told him to have his rooms put right. My God, he's had his parlour papered in pink and gold! I can never *pay* for it. Here I am, a swollen, helpless wreck, toiling till three in the morning to meet my taxes—to meet my *taxes,* Ralph!—and the coachman has his parlour papered in pink and gold! Oh, it's cruel, it's cruel, it's cruel, it's heart-breaking!" He clasped his hands and gibbered over them.

"If you never see your horses, and you're so hard up, why not sell them?" suggested Lingham.

"I never sold a horse or a dog in my life. Will you bring her to lunch to-day—your wife, I mean? I wonder whether I'm lunching at home. Where's Annie?"

In five years' intimate acquaintance Lingham had never seen him ring a bell, and now he went

to the top of the kitchen stairs to inquire whether he was expected to lunch at home. His luncheons, which he generally took at restaurants, were in truth his dinners, for at seven o'clock he sat down to work, and a heavy meal in the evening would have made him lazy.

He learnt that overnight he had expressed the intention of lunching out to-day unless it rained, and he immediately begged Ralph to bring his wife to Dolibo's. Though Lingham was afraid that Meenie would feel misgivings about her costume, he consented, and Parlett telephoned to the stables that the victoria was to come round at once. Annie, as usual, buttoned his boots.

They drove to Gower Street together, with *Angela* on the back seat, and Lingham was proud to see the impression that Meenie created as soon as she recovered from her surprise. Parlett was prepared to rave about any woman at sight, but this was evidently more than transient approval. With the sitting-room, abounding in defects—boards that started under the foot and let off reports like the crack of a rifle; a table that groaned when one wrote at it—he was charmed. The girl, who did not know him, thought he was carrying courtesy too far when he declared enviously that here his ideas would flow like wine from a cask. But he was quite sincere—while he spoke

—and almost believed that his horses, and his house, and the luxuries that he was slaving and ruining his health to retain, were worthless to him.

From the restaurant he insisted on their returning to Belsize Avenue to tea, and when they entered they found Mr. Vanderhoff awaiting him. It was an exciting experience to her to loll in Spencer Parlett's drawing-room, and listen to Albert Vanderhoff strumming snatches of his operas. She smiled in contrasting the situation with the way she might have met them both a year ago. With what awe she would have addressed them then! And Albert Vanderhoff passed the cake to her! They were quite simple, quite like anybody else.

She wondered if Parlett knew that she had been "in the profession," but presently he asked her if she sang, and she understood that Lingham had not told him.

"Yes," she said, "but not here!"

He burlesqued an attitude of deprecation. Vanderhoff could do no less than offer to accompany her; and as Lingham evidently wished her to accede, she went to the piano. The moselle-cup at Dolibo's had been good, and she was exhilarated by her social success. When the composer asked her what she would sing, she had the

courage to name a ballad out of his and Parlett's *Flo de Cologne*. Instantly he was intent, and Parlett, who justly believed that ballad to contain the best love-verses that he had ever written, looked as expectant as a child at its first pantomime.

It was an ovation for her; and she was prettier still, radiant and half confused, stealing ecstatic glances at her husband. Parlett, who of course regarded her from the standpoint of the librettist, waxed enthusiastic.

"But, my boy, my boy," he cried to Lingham, "the feeling, the sentiment! And every word *tells*—she gives every word its *value!* It's a pleasure to hear her, it's a *delight*. She ought to have been on the stage. What do you say, Albert? Wouldn't she have made a career? Wouldn't she have been a treat to write for?"

Vanderhoff repeated that madame had a very sympathetic voice.

"But she's an *actress!*" He turned to Meenie. "*You* don't know that—*I* watched your face. You *speak* with your face. You're very clever, you're an artist; you've got it *here!*"

"My wife has been on the stage," murmured Lingham; "but not for long; only for a year or two."

"Aha!" Parlett spread his arms, as one who says, "Behold my intuition!"

"But I never did any good," laughed Meenie; "the other people didn't agree with you."

He tapped his chest and held up three fingers. "Three!" he said. "Three women I've brought to the front out of the ranks. That's my gift; it's a peculiar gift of mine. Do you know that? I can see an extra-girl cross the stage and spot it if she has talent! It's a wonderful faculty I have. Do you know that, Ralph? Not many men have got it. It's a very highly developed nervous sensibility. I respond. Just in the same way I have an extraordinary power of communicating emotion. Do you know that, Albert? It's inborn. You can't acquire it. It astonishes people."

At this point Mr. Vanderhoff, who, being a musician, had his own vanities, struck loud chords to call attention to himself, and with profound emotion, but a small voice, sang another of his compositions.

Though Lingham and Meenie soon rose to go, it was Vanderhoff who left first. The dramatist had five minutes' conference with him in the hall, and then, returning to the room, was seized with a desire to take a stroll before he went to his desk.

In the warm twilight the three sauntered to the Heath. Already he appeared to her a mass of contradictions, and now, if she had been unmarried, the girl would have allowed herself to fall in love with him. The ardour with which he spoke of other men's work, and the modesty with which he judged his own, was startling; she thought at first that he must be in jest. The poetry in the man, his enthusiasms, made his companionship in some of his moods ideal. More widely read than many who posed as cultured, he seemed to her to be steeped in the literature of the world; yet withal he was a boy. When he quoted, it was never the delivery of a scholar being instructive, but the leaping utterance of an artist, young, fervent, bohemian, glowing at the city from an attic window, with a pen, and a brave heart.

To talk to him often stimulated Lingham. It stimulated him this evening. When they got back to the lodging, he made a dash at the difficulties of Chapter I, and completed it to his satisfaction before he went to bed. Moreover, he decided to ask the publishers for an advance of fifty pounds immediately. Why wait? It would be a distasteful errand, but there was small doubt that it would have to be accomplished sooner or

later, and the knowledge of being secure for a few months would be fortifying.

"Though even fifty pounds," he said, "won't keep us going till the book is done. With what we have left we shall be able to go on for—how long, pard?"

She was rather worse at arithmetic than he, and her pencil never had a point to it. Her pencil never had a point, and her purse was usually in the pocket of a skirt that she hadn't got on. After some minutes and intense application, however, she announced that with an addition of fifty pounds they could pay their way for about five months.

"And in five months," she said, "anything may happen. Besides, they might let you have more if you asked for it."

"They have lost money over the last one; I don't think they'd feel inclined to part with a hundred again. And then, that was finished when I got the hundred! No, I think fifty is all I can ask for; I daresay I shall get that."

One is often sanguine at night. When he shaved, he was less confident. He wished that he had broached the subject when he called upon them earlier in the week; in conversation he could have approached it gradually, and now he would have to blurt it out. He breakfasted without rel-

ish, and upstairs Meenie hung about him and wished him luck.

When he reached the offices of Messrs. Alport and Son, one of the clerks whistled through a tube, and requested him to take a seat until Mr. Alport, junr., was disengaged. The father seldom came to town now. There was a girl with a pale face, and a parcel, waiting too—a beginner, tremulous, shabby, full of illusions yet, nursing her first novel with unspoken prayers. Presently the clerk came back, and said, "Will you step this way, Mr. Lingham?" And the girl flashed a curious glance—half admiration, and half envy—as the name fell. It was rather piteous. Lingham wondered whether she could be much worse off than he was.

Mr. Alport was a man of about Lingham's own age, with the Oxford voice and literary tastes. As the girl had envied the novelist, the novelist had often envied his publisher; and the young man with the money had also his struggles. He struggled with a temperament. His destiny was to conduct a business on strictly commercial lines and to know that behind his back he was abused by writers whom he would have been glad to call his friends.

He offered the author a cigarette, and motioned to an armchair, which was associated in his

mind with many distressing interviews. Lingham cleared his throat.

"You didn't expect to see me again so soon, Mr. Alport?" he said, balancing his hat on his knee.

"I'm always pleased to have a visit from you, Mr. Lingham."

"I looked in because I've a book on the stocks. Heaven alone knows whether it will sell, but I think it is going to be all right."

"Is the brutal middleman to hear what the theme is?"

"Yes, I want to talk about it." He gave an outline. The tale sounded very bald to him, reduced to halting words, but Mr. Alport listened attentively, and nodded.

"As you observe," he said, "only Heaven can answer for the public! Of course, it's excellent; you get to the heart of things, as you always do. I look forward to reading it. If everybody admired your work as much as I do, Mr. Lingham, you would find me—like Angela Brown—an ideal publisher."

"Would you care to give me a commission to write it?" asked Lingham, stroking his hat the wrong way.

Mr. Alport winced. He drew a diagram on the blotting-pad.

"We shall see it, I suppose?" he said. "You mean to give us the first refusal of it, I hope?" His tone was really a plea to the other not to say any more; and Lingham understood it, and cursed the poverty that drove him on.

"I should like the commission," he said. "In plain English, I want fifty pounds on the signing of the contract. You can't lose by that. If the thing sells well or not, you are bound to get fifty pounds back."

To the store of Alport's painful memories the armchair had contributed another. He shook his head.

"When it's finished," he murmured, "I have very little doubt that we shall be able to meet your views. You know we have always done our best."

"You can't meet them now, eh?"

"I am afraid not. With every wish to be amiable, I am afraid I can't. Forgive my saying so, but your hand might lose its cunning; the plot, after all, is only the peg to hang one's ideas on. If you will bring us the story when it is done, Mr. Lingham, you shall have an answer within three days." He rose. "I trust we shall be able to make a better arrangement for you than the one you suggest."

The pale-faced girl was waiting still, and again she regarded the author jealously.

He tramped back in the blaze of noon to Gower Street. His wife was at the window; she knew that he had failed by the way his figure drooped. All the morning she had considered his coming home so; all the morning she had been chafing her courage to combat his objections and to cut the knot.

"It didn't come off," he said. "Don't worry, darling; we shall get through somehow!"

"Neither of us is going to worry," she answered brightly. "It's just a tangle for a minute, and if we're sensible, and chummy, and work together, we shall straighten it out. Ralph, you must go and ask Mr. Parlett to give me a part in his opera. It's no good saying you won't; you must! You heard what he said; ask him to give me a part. When we're in smooth waters again, I'll give it up if you want me to; I'm not ambitious any more. But I'm not going to sit down and see you grow grey with anxiety when I can help it. If *you* don't go to him, *I* shall."

He kissed her, and told her that the company was already formed, and that Parlett wouldn't entrust a part to a novice, even if he were asked. But she stood firm.

"Try," she entreated.

"Meenie," he exclaimed doggedly, "I won't have you go back to the stage!"

"But it's necessary. Oh, my dear!"—she clung to him—"is this marriage, is it fair to me? You call me your 'pard,' and you won't let me help in our home! It's the only way; can't you see that it's the only way? Let us go through life hand-in-hand, dear!"

Then he caught her close; but still he refused.

"It isn't the only way," he said; "it shan't be the only way! We have over five weeks, and I can get money as soon as the book is done. Very well, then, I'll do it in five weeks! If I work day and night, if I never eat, if I never sleep, I'll do it in the time, by God!"

"This isn't marriage," she stammered.

"It's me!" he cried, ungrammatical and white. "Help me, don't stop me, let me go on! I'll write as long as I *can* write. Other men could do it, why shouldn't I? Promise! Give me your word you'll do nothing without my consent."

So she promised. But she wondered why man's love and woman's should be such different things.

## CHAPTER XVIII

A BELL hung outside their door. Mrs. Kis used it to call Emmie downstairs when she was wanted. All day long, while he drove his pen, that bell pealed through his brain. During five weeks it seemed to him that it was never still, for when he slept at last it clashed in his dreams. To the furious pealing of that accursed bell he wrote his novel at the table that groaned and squeaked. And because he had sworn never to go to bed until he had covered the right number of pages, the book was done in time. He praised God, and damned the novel.

It was done! And though it was unworthy of him, though he had sacrificed psychology to speed, it was not contemptible. He sent it to Mr. Alport by express delivery, with a line reminding him of his promise.

It was done! That he would execrate it for his sufferings as long as he lived, that it had been brought forth with blood and sweat, that he would never see its cover without shuddering in remembrance, didn't matter. But he winced to

know that some of the reviewers would sneer at him because he had to earn a living. "Mr. Lingham has a shrewd sense of what the public wants" —he knew somebody would say that. How easy to disdain other people's necessities! It was only by the public favour he could hold his wife.

In this world nobody is ever in the wrong, as his lights display the situation; nobody's attitude is ever so indefensible that he isn't perfectly justified according to his own view; and no marriage service can make man and woman's standpoints one. Meenie had suffered also during these five weeks. She had been condemned to watch the husband she loved struggling with a task that strained him to the edge of collapse because he was too proud to accept her aid, and she felt that, for once, he had been small. Lingham felt that he was taking the only manly course. The thought of allowing his wife to return to the stage, of weathering a storm by means of her voice and abbreviated skirts, horrified him. Quite naturally he harped on the abbreviated skirts; they were tangible, a legitimate grievance. But as no one is ever wrong to himself, so is no one ever quite candid. He shrank from more than her putting on the skirts; he shrank from taking off his own plumes. It is much easier to make a present gracefully than to accept one well; far

easier to lend with cordiality than to borrow without embarrassment. The great soul is not his who can be generous, but his who can appreciate generosity without resenting it. Of such souls there are very few, if all secrets were unveiled. The self-respecting man is angry with fate, and gradually fate is represented by his friend. It had been facile to Lingham to pluck the girl from want and play the hero; but before they had been married a year, to eat the bread of her providing without bitterness—he hadn't the stomach for that.

On the tension fell a double knock. The housemaid brought in two letters, and he grabbed them from the tray. Mr. Alport had been as good as his word and written within three days. He did not write what he thought, that the story was below the author's standard; he said it was "a departure from his usual style." For that reason the firm were somewhat doubtful of the way it would be received. They would be glad to publish the book on the same terms as the last, but he regretted sincerely to say that they were unable to offer any sum on account of royalties.

Lingham read the lines in a harsh voice. When he ceased, neither he nor Meenie spoke for quite a minute. He folded the letter in three again, and crossed the room, and dropped the paper on

the mantelpiece. Still she could find no comment. She put her arms round his neck in silence, and laid her cheek against his face. Because she had been blaming him she sorrowed for him now more vehemently. She was stricken for him; the blow was brutal; those awful weeks, those relentless, inexorable weeks for nothing! . . . The double knocks came faintly from the distance.

"He's a gentleman," he said at last. "Of course, the thing is muck—he doesn't say so."

The woman in her found voice.

"He's mean," she cried, "mean! he doesn't want to pay."

They stood looking vaguely from the window at the crawling hansoms, and the errand-boys. Both were dominated by a thought that they would not utter yet. The man could not bring himself to admit his helplessness; his wife knew that to say, "You must let me do it, after all, dear," would be to twist the knife in his wound.

"You haven't opened the other letter," she murmured.

"Open it," he said.

" 'Dear Sir' "—she began—" 'I have just read *Angela Brown, Publisher.* I am a young man struggling to make a living by my pen. From you, an established author, with a heart to feel,

I am venturing to crave a few pounds to enable me——' "

"Dear God!" said Lingham feebly. "Put it down."

Clinging to straws, he wrote offering to sell the book to the firm outright. He was scarcely disappointed next day to hear that they were not prepared to buy it; he had expected nothing else. That night the thought was spoken. She whispered it to him in the dark. And in the morning he went to Parlett.

Annie, when she let him in, was very pale. She faltered, "Look, sir!" And looking, he saw a large hole in one of the panes of the swing-doors; the shattered glass was littering the ground. It was his luck to have come to beg a service at the worst time.

"Mr. Parlett?" he asked.

The girl nodded tremulously. "And he has broken things in the study. He's in the dining-room now, sir. I haven't seen him so bad for years."

He went in, and found Parlett hurrying round the table, with his hands clasped on his head. His face was crimson, and his blue eyes looked as if he had been crying. At Lingham's entrance his pace slackened for an instant, and he tried to smile.

"Hullo, Ralph!" he said weakly. "How are you, boy? Sit down. Don't—don't mind me; I shall be all right as soon as I've worked it off."

Breakfast was set, but the cup was clean, and the cover was still on the dish. Lingham put no questions. He filled his pipe, and smoked moodily, while the playwright rushed round the room talking to a third person who was not there. The spectacle would have been comic but for the sobs which in moments broke the man's voice. His great chest heaved, his nostrils quivered; intermittently he did, indeed, try to restrain his hysteria, and then was swept into headlong raving violence by his own address.

"You introduced a step-dance into the drama with the 'best intentions,' did you, Mr. Bedbrooke? In your opinion that scene is a 'good opportunity for a step-dance'? You lie, you blackhearted buffoon! you ruin the work of my brain to get another round of applause for yourself. Did you write me anything about it till I found it out? No, you never meant me to hear of it! If I hadn't seen the notices, I shouldn't have known. You scoundrel! You treacherous scoundrel! In *your* opinion, eh? *You* have opinions about the Drama to-day, have you, Mr. Bedbrooke? When you were Wang-Tang-Too, the Cannibal King, outside a booth in a fair,

with a penn'orth of raw liver in your hand, you had fewer opinions! What do you take me for? Eh? What do you mean?" He stopped at the sideboard, covered three telegraph-forms with a message that remained unfinished, and pitched the pencil into the grate. "Give me some tea!" he said, dropping into his chair.

Emboldened by Lingham's presence, the maid had stolen in; and as she complied, the sugar-tongs fluttered visibly. She displayed a bloater with persuasive murmurs, but Parlett would have none of it, and did no more than gulp the tea.

All the time he kept talking to Mr. Bedbrooke; and at last Lingham, engrossed by his errand, and impatient to come to the point, flung out:

"If somebody's spoiling your piece, why not tell him he has got to play it properly, or give it up?"

Parlett looked as if a brilliant light had been shed on the subject. "Yes," he exclaimed, "he has got to play it properly, or give it up!—Or you've got to give it up, do you hear? Or I'll take it away from you, you crook—now, right off! you shan't ring the curtain up to-night! . . . I let him have it because he came here and pleaded to me; I let it to him cheap; I wanted to do the little man a turn. And now he deceives me!

He ruins me; he turns my drama into a musical comedy—the work of months, of my tortured days, and sleepless nights!" The veins were starting from his forehead. "You felon! you reptile! you thankless, mindless Frankenstein's monster! All alike! Not a friend in the world! Not a man straight!—not one you can trust! To *Hell* with the whole double-faced gang!" He caught the bloater from the dish and hurled it through the air. It spun to a landscape, glanced off a marble bust, and scattered on the floor; particles of it splashed the mirror. He bowed his head on his arms and moaned. There was a long silence. Annie moved nervelessly about the room with a table napkin, collecting fragments, but they were countless and clung everywhere. Presently he raised his face, and watched her through wet lashes:

"That fish," he murmured, "seems to have gone further than any since the miracle. . . . Oh, I'm bad, Ralph, bad! I'm getting worse; I shall die in an asylum. I've broken the glass in the door, and a *beau*tiful vase. I usedn't to be so bad as this—I always smashed the cheap things, and now I don't consider."

"You could control yourself if you liked," said Lingham.

"I can*not*. My mother went to her wardrobe

before I was born and tore up all her clothes. I was the same as a child . . . and then she used to beat her breast and say, 'Poor little Spencer! Oh, it's all my fault!' Once I threw a boiled apple pudding at my nurse—it was a terrible affair that. But not a boiled apple pudding as I get them here; these people"—he glanced at the parlourmaid disparagingly—"don't know how to make a boiled apple pudding. Ann Fidgin, our old cook at home, what puddings *she* used to make! A rich, soft, golden apple pudding"—his tone was mellifluence tinged with regret—"it gushed a clear, sweet juice, the colour of daffodils. I've never had them right since. . . . Do you ever wonder what the women who have loved us think of our goings on if they can see down after they die? I often hope my rages don't upset my mother so much as they did. It wouldn't be Heaven for her, you know, old chap, if she were reproaching herself all the time because she tore up her clothes. I like to think of the dead as Maeterlinck regards God: 'A God who sits smiling on a mountain, and to whom our gravest offences are only as the naughtiness of puppies playing on a hearthrug.' That's how a man wants to think of the dead. It's not a woman's idea; Browning knew the woman's idea —the horrible *haunting* fear of the wife that, if

she dies first, her husband'll forget her and when she's in Heaven the other women will 'know so much, and talk together'! Ah, great, *great, great!*

" 'And is it not the bitterer to think
That disengage our hands, and thou wilt sink
Although thy love was love in very deed?
I know that nature! Pass a festive day,
Thou dost not throw its relic-flower away
Nor bid its music's loitering echo speed.'

'Its music's loitering echo speed'! Oh, *divine!*"

Gesture came naturally to him when he quoted, and he had been buttering toast and still held the knife; yet the fervour of his voice, the intense earnestness of the man, prevented his being ridiculous. His paroxysm was already forgotten; he was wrapped in pure enjoyment of the poetry. If one of the aspirants who frequently intruded here could have entered now, Spencer Parlett would have confirmed his fanciful picture of the Literary Man At Home.

" 'Re-coin thyself, and give it them to spend—
It all comes to the same thing at the end,
Since mine thou wast, mine art, and mine shalt be,
Faithful or faithless; sealing up the sum
Or lavish of thy treasure, thou must come
Back to the heart's place here I keep for thee!' "

The knife greased his waistcoat, and he threw it aside and lit a cigar.

"Well, how are you?" he inquired pleasantly; "why don't you talk?"

"I haven't had much chance," said Lingham. "I have come to talk; I've come to talk on a very serious matter—I want you to do something for me."

Parlett was visibly discomposed; between the effort to be genial, and the terror of being asked for a loan, his face assumed an anguished smile painful to see.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"I want an engagement for my wife in *A Ring o' Roses*. I can't get any money on my book; I've no salary, and I've no capital. It's a fine position to be in; I'm prouder of myself than I can say! But we can't starve—and even if *I* were willing to starve I couldn't ask her to starve too—so I have got to let her do something."

"My dear boy," exclaimed Parlett, lifting his shoulders, "my dear boy, the thing is cast! It was cast weeks ago; the rehearsals begin on Thursday. You should have spoken before."

"You said you thought she was clever," muttered Lingham stubbornly; "why are you frightened to trust her with a part in your own opera?"

"Oh, don't talk pickles," said Parlett, flaring

up; "I tell you the company is complete. I *would* have trusted her with a small part—you know I would! . . . that is if Vanderhoff didn't object. There's nothing left to engage, except the chorus; that's no good to you."

"I don't know; I suppose it would be better for her than what she has got."

"Thirty-five shillings a week!" He smiled.

"Well, damn it," cried Lingham, "I tell you we haven't got anything at all! You don't seem to understand English. The situation is desperate. Thirty-five shillings a week would keep her, anyhow. The manager pays the fares from place to place, doesn't he?"

"Oh yes. She can have a chorus shop to-morrow, if you like."

"'Like'? I don't 'like' it much, my friend. I'd go and mend the road in preference. But they don't want me to mend a road, and it wouldn't keep us if I did. If she gets thirty-five shillings a week, she'll be provided for as long as the tour lasts; *I* must shift for myself. There's nothing half so sweet in life as Love's young dream. It's a pretty marriage, isn't it? We shan't have been married a year till the end of next month, and I've got to turn her out to earn her own living. . . . Of course, every outsider who sponges on his wife goes to his pals whining

at the cruelty of his fate. I suppose I look as big a cur as anybody?"

"You're a very sensitive, morbid sort of ass, aren't you?" said Parlett inquiringly. "I'll make an appointment for her to see the stage-manager to-morrow; that'll save her hanging about on Thursday with the crowd. I'll drop you a line to-night."

It occurred to Lingham that, after all, his poverty was not Parlett's fault.

"Thank you, old chap," he said, with some degree of heartiness, "thank you very much. Then I can tell her it's settled?"

"Yes; tell your wife that if there had been a part open, I should have been delighted to suggest her for it. Well, what shall *you* do while she is away?"

"I shall take a bedroom somewhere and try for a job on another paper. Perhaps I might get some reviewing to do. But I don't know any editors; it will be very difficult. You can't introduce me to anybody, can you?"

"Editors aren't in my line," said Parlett; "I'm not a journalist—you want to get hold of a journalist for that. If you were a doctor, now, I could keep you busy. Oh, my boy, I'm ill! As soon as I eat I get big, big! And look at my hands—that's all gout."

He dilated on his complaints eloquently, and on his trials in general. In one minute his visitor's troubles had faded from his mind, and the Universe had dwindled to his own; in two, he was sighing that Lingham's was "an ideal life."

But when he said that he never sold a horse or a dog, he might have added that he never sold a man; and Lingham went back to Meenie with the knowledge that Parlett's word was as good as his bond.

## CHAPTER XIX

So it proved. Mrs. Ralph Lingham was engaged for the tour of *A Ring o' Roses,* and while the husband tramped the wet pavements of Fleet Street, the wife was on the stage of the Opéra Comique, where the company was rehearsing every day. Once more she was a chorus-girl, and again she called herself "Miss Meenie Weston."

She had had visions of earning enough for both, and the disappointment had been severe when she learnt that no part was open. Still, from experience she knew that she could live on a pound a week when the tour began, and she meant to send Ralph fifteen shillings every Saturday, though he had insisted that her salary was to be spent on herself.

In the meantime they left Mrs. Kis's and rented a top bedroom in Guilford Street, and he pawned his watch and chain for ten pounds. If he could have viewed the crisis with his wife's eyes, the fortnight that they spent in that top bedroom would have been happy enough, in spite of the impending separation. Nor was it wholly

melancholy though he could not. He was not able to regard her in the way she wished to be regarded—as a comrade of strength and responsibility equal to his own, but he admired her spirit too strongly to be candid now that candour could serve no purpose.

The company departed for Liverpool on a Sunday, and he went to King's Cross to see her off. To him more than to her the twenty minutes in the station were poignant; to her the platform presented a familiar sight—to him it was painfully strange. The tribe of vociferous women and shabby men; the gapes of the onlookers; the windows of the train plastered with the name of the opera in scarlet capitals, sent his humiliation home to him with a rush. A cad in authority told her curtly in which compartment to sit. There were seven other girls in it—her associates; they wore cheap finery, and no gloves. The compartment was a babel of bad English. The husband stood at the door to say good-bye. Three of the young women made eyes at him while he waited. Her love was deeper than his, though he was very fond of her, and she had seen all that he strove to hide; but she did not plumb the depth of his shame as he stood there; she did not guess how nearly he flung reason to the winds

and snatched her from the train before it could start.

The flag waved. He forced a farewell smile, and maintained it till she withdrew her head. She had gone—he was powerless to support her! He walked back under his umbrella abjectly. But for the abasement of poverty to-day, it was as if his bachelorhood had been revived. He had known Guilford Street for fifteen years—lived in a dozen of its lodgings—and, after the embryonic hotel at the corner, it wore the old familiar aspect: the road was being pulled up, and the houses were being pulled down. The "single room" to which he was to be transferred now that he was alone—how many such "single rooms" had he occupied in his life? Yes, he was fond of her, but the proof that his marriage had been a madness was overwhelming. He had no wish to avail himself of the privileges of marriage and to escape its duties.

On Tuesday evening the drudge brought up a letter from her, and a packet forwarded by Mrs. Kis. He learnt by the letter that the opera had scored a great success, and found by the package that the manager of the Sovereignty had no use for his play. He read it through again; he could not think that it was bad. On the other side of a locked door were two counter-jumpers from Re-

gent Street. All the evening, while he read, they told each other amusing anecdotes in gruff voices, and expressed their sense of humour with their feet. Their stamping drove him wild, and he asked God how a man who lived in lodgings could be expected to write. In the morning he asked the landlady. She said that "young men would be young men"; she was unusual only inasmuch as she was honest—she had not been in the business long. It had been raining for three weeks, and he remarked, "A filthy climate, Mrs. Watkins!" as she let him out. She said, "Lor, Mr. Lingham, one would never think you was an Englishman to hear you running down old England like that!" From the grocer's in Lamb's Conduit Street he despatched the luckless comedy to the Diadem, a note of congratulation to Parlett, and several cheerful falsehoods to his wife.

The days are no more when authors foregathered in taverns over a pint of stout and a steak, and Lingham's circle of acquaintances was not wide. It was no easy matter for him to find regular employment. He was too old a hand to dream that he could pay his way by means of unsolicited short stories, even though he were to scatter them broadcast, and to obtain a commission for a series was almost hopeless. Only once

had he had an engagement of that kind—on a paper called *Bon-Ton*—and then the terms had been half a guinea for three thousand words. When Meenie had been gone a week he changed his last sovereign, and seemed as far as ever from a salary.

Monday brought him another tender little letter, enclosing a postal order. She had fulfilled her intention, and a lump rose to his throat. He could not take her money; it was impossible that he could let her work and stint herself too. He could not take her money, but he saw how delighted she was to send it, how timid of accentuating his discomfiture, and it was difficult to frame a refusal that would not wound her.

After he had evolved the most specious in his power—an answer containing many endearments, but also the remittance which it had been her joy to make—he determined before he posted it to adventure *Bon-Ton* this morning. Probably in that quarter, and at a starvation wage, he could arrange for a series. If he did, he would tear the answer up, and write instead that he had found something to do, and would have accepted her aid gladly had it been essential.

*Bon-Ton* was not a paper of so high a standing as the title implied. It was a minor periodical owned and edited by a gentleman whose tastes

inclined to journalism, and whose livelihood was gained by pawnbroking. Mr. Hunt, despite the incongruity of his pursuits, was a very agreeable man of charming address, and his contributors—in Lingham's time at least—had never betrayed their knowledge that the name of "Hunt" under the three gilt balls a little lower down the street had any connection with the courteous chief who examined their copy in the office of *Bon-Ton*. With a delicacy born of respect, they always pawned their watches somewhere else.

When Lingham was admitted to the editorial den, Mr. Hunt was much pleased to see him.

"I've often wondered whether 'Ralph Lingham,' the novelist, and the 'Ralph Lingham' who used to do our short stories, were one and the same," he said. "*Are* you the author of *Angela Brown, Publisher,* and the rest of them?"

"I *am* that celebrity," said Lingham.

"I congratulate you very heartily. You have gone far since those days."

"You're very kind. . . . 'One always returns to one's first love.' "

"Do you mean that you are open to do something for us again?"

"Why not?" said Lingham. "It was with that idea I came to see you."

But Mr. Hunt, it transpired, was in no need

of short stories. He was now offering in each number a prize for the best submitted, and found that the amateurs wrote them quite well enough for him, besides buying the paper regularly to learn the result of the competition.

"And then the winner spends two-thirds of the prize money on copies to send to his friends," he explained blandly. "To get a professional man to buy copies one must give him a page interview and a portrait. But I should have liked your work all the same. What is it you want—just an appointment, or must the work be fiction?"

"I'm not particular. Is there a vacancy on the staff?"

"Would you care to do the dramatic criticism?" asked Mr. Hunt.

"What are you paying for it?"

The proprietor confessed that the rate was not high. "But it wouldn't take up much of your time," he pointed out. "And—I don't know if you're fond of the theatre—you would be able to see every piece before it had been out a week, and one or two of the houses send us a ticket for the first night. Thirty shillings."

"I afraid I couldn't, really," said Lingham, masking alacrity.

"I am sorry I can't do better," said Mr. Hunt; "it's the most the paper'll stand."

The novelist pulled his moustache. "It's very little," he murmured.

"Think it over," said Mr. Hunt.

Lingham shrugged his shoulders. "All right," he said, "I'll take it." They settled the details before he left, and Mr. Hunt, who went out at the same time, inquired "if it was too early for him."

The berth and the whisky sent him home in high feather, and Meenie received a gay epistle describing the brilliance of his prospects. "I am to loll in stalls," he wrote, "and to be paid for it. My only trouble is the thought of the laundry bills for so many dress shirts. Take back the fifteen shillings that thou gavest, and revel in luxury! You're a darling."

When the unacted playwright had been a dramatic critic for about a month, a long telegram from her arrived. She telegraphed that a woman was leaving the company, and asked him to implore Parlett to let her have the part. By her prolixity at the cost of a halfpenny a word, he saw that she was very much in earnest, and he went to Belsize Avenue as soon as her appeal was digested. He showed his friend her message, and after Parlett had said several times that no doubt the manager had someone else in his eye, he rang up for a trunk call to ascertain.

" 'Flora' is a very important part," he repeated irritably while they waited for the bell to sound. " 'Flora' sings 'Consequential Carrie.' 'Small' part, your wife calls it? She talks like a prima-donna. It's *not* a small part. If she had had more experience it would be another thing, but —well, I'll do what I can. But *I* don't make the engagements—I can only suggest her for it."

When communication with the manager was established at last, Lingham sat attentive on the table. "Is that you?" cried Parlett. "Eh? . . . Yes—I'm talking to you. . . . Yes. I say, my boy, how about 'Flora'? Is it cast for Newcastle? . . . What? . . . Oh!"

"*Is* it cast?" exclaimed Lingham under his breath.

"No. Well, what do you want me to say?"

"Say she's just the woman for it."

"It's a great responsibility," growled Parlett; " 'Consequential Carrie,' she sings!" He bent to the tube again: "I say, you've got just the woman in the company! Meenie Weston. She's in the chorus. . . . Eh? . . . Oh, do you think so?" He turned to Lingham. "He says she's too *petite*—she wouldn't look it."

"Say she's very clever," said Lingham hurriedly, picturing her eagerness.

"This is shameful," muttered Parlett. . . .

"She's damn clever, my boy! Trust to Poppa—I know what I'm talking about. . . . What? . . . Oh, I should think—er——" He glanced over his shoulder. "What'll your wife take?"

"I don't know," said Lingham. "What's it worth?"

"This woman gets seven pounds a week. Say four pounds ten?"

"Call it five!" said Lingham.

"Five pounds," continued Parlett through the telephone. "She'll be cheap at the money. . . . What? . . . Well, you wouldn't get anyone else for that! . . . What? . . . Yes, she's a find! . . . Right you are! What was the house last night?" He chuckled. "Good-bye."

And this was how Meenie obtained her first part. Her emotions were unutterable; the edge of joy was so keen that it hurt. But there were trials to come, too. Her rehearsals began the next morning, and continued for a fortnight. A company always resent having to attend rehearsals for the benefit of a new member—although they recognise that their attendance is necessary—and when the new member is a promoted chorus-girl they resent it still more. *A Ring o' Roses* company, with a few exceptions, were openly disdainful. They "walked through" their "business" with raised eyebrows; and some of the

chorus ladies, who had to disappoint desirable acquaintances in order to be provoked by an ex-companion's sudden importance, tittered at her acting as loudly as they dared.

For she had to act—she solely. It was a horrible ordeal to caper about the stage and simulate excitement and rapture among a listless crowd who replied in murmurs and kept their hands in their muffs. Her limbs seemed weighted and though she hated the girls who tittered, she felt that she was looking ridiculous.

The stage-manager was considerable enough, but the low comedian—an ill-conditioned brute who had been expelled from a lodging-house in Manchester for half-killing his dog—cowed her more than all the others combined. He was not satisfied to be scornful, he was perpetually exasperated. One of her scenes was played with him, and for every line she uttered he had an impatient rebuke. She became stupid with timidity. At last, when he muttered that he "hadn't been in the profession twenty years to have his laughs corpsed by a b—— chorus-girl," the stage-manager came to her rescue. After that the comedian did not interfere with her, but she knew that she had an enemy for the rest of the tour, and that he would try to confuse her before the audience by every means in his power.

And constantly now she had the same nightmare. She dreamt that she was standing in the wings of a theatre, waiting to go "on" for a part that she had not read. She was faint with horror. Nearer and nearer came the cue—in another instant she must stand speechless on the stage. The agony always woke her before the cue fell. But that nightmare recurred to her at intervals as long as she lived.

Her début was to be made at Newcastle, and in the Newcastle playbills on the momentous Monday she beheld her name printed in a cast for the first time. It looked to her strange and conspicuous—it stood out from the column to her in every shop window. How insignificant now appeared the string of names at the foot: "Bridesmaids, Courtiers, Peasants—Misses Neilson, Erroll, Vandeleur, Norise," etc.! The type seemed to have shrunk since her advancement.

She begged one of the bills from the advance-agent to send to Ralph. At seven o'clock she went to the theatre, quivering. She thanked God that she was to dress with two of the principals to-night—under the envious comments of the chorus she might have broken down. She found immediately that she was not to escape comment as it was. On the staircase there was an altercation; one of the two women was complaining

that she was insulted by the arrangement, and she did not lower her voice as Meenie approached.

"Putting a chorus-girl to dress with me! Yes, she is! Of course she is! I do object; my position in the company——"

"Miss Weston is engaged for 'Flora,'" said the stage-manager; "you have always dressed with 'Flora.'"

"Yes, when you had an artist for the part! A chorus-girl? What next? I never heard of such a thing in my life. To-morrow night——"

Meenie hurried by. The woman, pledged to silence, presently ignored her with a rudeness that was meant for dignity. The other dropped a few kindly remarks. While the girl made up, the grease-paint shook in her hand, and the crashing of the cymbals and the bangs of the drum struck terror to her heart. Until the second act "Flora" did not appear.

"Beginners, second act!" the call-boy yelled, and she crept to the wings, suffocating with dread. The stage-manager glanced at her anxiously. The incident on the stairs had been enough to unhinge a more experienced actress.

"Nervous, my dear?" he asked.

She tried to smile.

He saw, and said no more.

"Clear, please!"

The perspiring scene-shifters hurried from the stage. The chorus drew a breath, and poised themselves for airy tripping. She had three minutes left.

She moved to the entrance from which she was to run on. The orchestra burst forth afresh, and she could see the curtain rise. While she waited for her cue, one thought whirled in her: the thought of all she had to justify—her long belief in herself, Ralph's request to Parlett, Parlett's asseveration. "It's my chance," she kept thinking, "what I have hoped for, what I have felt I could do. Oh, let me do it—don't let me fail! My chance is here! this is my chance!"

The cue came, and the stage-manager touched her arm:

"Now! my dear," he said.

## CHAPTER XX

BECAUSE the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* gave her the first praise that she saw she was thankful to it for life. All the criticisms that she received were good; the correspondents of *The Era* and *The Stage* made her laugh with delight when she read their notices, but the praise of the Newcastle paper at the breakfast-table next morning brought tears to her eyes.

She had known when she left the theatre that her manager was pleased with her, but it was not till she received an answer to her glad telegram to Guilford Street that she knew the extent of his approval: "Parlett hears you are great."

Theatrical folk have their own terminology. She was not great, nor was the term used to signify what the rest of the world means by "greatness," but she was dainty and naïve; and she became a favourite with the audience in every town. Her voice, and her face—behind the footlights her face was beautiful—appealed to everyone. Then in the "Flora" costume, with her hair down, she looked surprisingly young, and old

ladies in the pit would say, "Oh, that dear little girl! I do wish that dear little girl would come on again!" A check-taker was an acquaintance of the baggage-man's, and the baggage-man told the wardrobe-mistress, and the wardrobe-mistress mentioned it to the acting-manager, and eventually it got to headquarters. And there was no longer a question whether other principals would share dressingrooms with her, though many disparaged her much more than if she had been a failure. On the stage personality is nine-tenths of the battle, but they who have all the tricks of experience at their finger-tips feel bitter when a novice outstrips them by virtue of mere charm.

In February it was whispered that *A Ring o' Roses* was to be taken to London. No sooner did the rumour reach Meenie than she wrote to Lingham inquiring excitedly whether she would be retained for the West End production if the news proved true. But he was unable to give her a definite reply.

In March it was settled that the opera was to be put on at the Piccadily during the following month. Numerous changes were made in the company before a London verdict was challenged. The heroine of the tour was replaced by a singer at forty pounds a week, and a popular comedian supplanted the one who kicked his dog. How-

ever, the management decided that to engage a "Flora" with a reputation, when they had a good one for five pounds, would be an unwarranted expense, and among the few who kept their parts were Meenie and the young woman who had spoken to her kindly on the occasion of her début.

This woman was her one friend. "Miss Stewart," as she was called, had also a husband in town. He had an accountant's berth in the City, and she confided to Meenie that she was only remaining on the stage till they could pay some money that they owed. As soon as they had saved it, she was going to stay at home in their "dear little flat." She loved to talk about it, and Meenie was to go to see her there.

The girl had had the advantage of watching her predecessor for a month before the promotion; now she had the advantage of having played the part night after night for three months before she faced the London Press. Circumstances had been greatly in her favour, and she reached St. Pancras buoyantly. Lingham was on the platform. She had written to him to tell Mrs. Watkins that they would like to have the drawing-room floor, for with six pounds ten a week between them top bedrooms were out of the question; and when they went in, the table was laid for

dinner, and a bundle of violets that he had bought to welcome her bloomed in a bowl.

The wide drawing-room looked luxurious to him with its saddle-bag suite, from which the first gloss had worn, and the draped mantelshelf, and the piano. After the feeble lamp upstairs, the gaselier was a blaze of splendour. At dinner it was she who was the more talkative; there were so many things to tell him that had always evaded her pen, but there were very few for him to impart. When they rose she opened her trunk, and reappeared with a meerschaum pipe, and a silver match-box, and a paper-knife with an angel's head on the handle—little presents that she had collected for him on her travels. She was so pleased to return that she chattered and laughed in a breath; and he was happy to have her back with him. But he could not produce any presents because he had had no money to spare, and as he thanked her, the violets lost their charm in his eyes.

They no longer dwelt on the comedy as his passport to public favour; it had been rejected in too many quarters by now. And he seemed to her to build but little on a book that he had begun, though this was to be no pot-boiler, but a piece of work that would occupy a year. Hitherto there had always been something they

looked forward to together—some Jack-o'-lantern that was to be their sun—and she missed in him the cheerful allusions beginning "When." She felt, as the glow of the reunion faded, that he was a depressed man trying to be lively.

The next time that Lingham saw Parlett he received boisterous congratulations on his wife's talent. The dramatist was in his dithyrambic key. "You're a damned lucky chap to be married to such a clever little woman," he exclaimed; "she'll be getting big terms before she has done. Wait till you see her on the first night!" Lingham said he was glad the author was satisfied.

The opera was to be produced at the Piccadilly on a Wednesday evening, and his latest copy for *Bon-Ton* had always to be handed in by Wednesday afternoon. Neither he nor Meenie was willing for the paper to come out that week without a notice of *A Ring o' Roses,* and he could not go to the dress rehearsal; so she told him the story, and he wrote his criticism of the production on Wednesday morning.

With his criticism of his wife's performance he took great pains. It is not so easy to write a laudatory notice as a supercilious one. With the best intentions in the world, he got on slowly.

"'A pronounced success was made by Miss

Meenie Weston, a young lady whose name is new to me,' " he read. "How is that for a start?"

She leant over his shoulder.

"Very good," she said.

"Do you think so? I don't like it much. . . . No, I shan't say that; it's elementary. . . . But the surprise of the evening was caused by an artist whose name in the programme was unfamiliar.' That's bad, too. Well, never mind; give me an impression. What do you do first?"

"I run on, you know; I call the chorus round me to tell them the news."

"What news?"

"Why, the news of the heroine's elopement, Silly! It's a speech—I've some nice lines; I'm laughing."

"Oh, I understand. Where are we? . . . 'Whose name in the programme was unfamiliar.' You write, and I'll dictate—I think better when I'm walking about. Are you ready?"

She nibbled the penholder, and nodded.

" 'Suddenly a young girl had run onto the stage, brimming with laughter. She clapped her hands, and beckoned the others close to hear her news.' "

"I don't clap my hands," she said.

"Well, you ought to! I can't spoil my description because you don't do it. Let that pass.

. . . 'The others close to hear her news.' Er—'She was fortunate in having some of the brightest lines in the "book" to speak—and Mr. Parlett's "book" is as happy as his lyrics—but it was not the tale that she had to tell that startled us; it was the girl. She seemed to be bubbling with such irrepressible glee, her merriment was so infectious, that a ripple of expectant laughter stirred the audience, too. I think we all leant forward in our seats a little. We were listening to a madcap escaped from school, or to an unknown actress who was mistress of her art.' "

"Oh, Ralph!" she said, putting down her pen; "that's *sweet!*" She sighed. "It's too much; not 'mistress' of her art, dear."

He did not think it was an art at all, but it would have sounded like jealousy to say so now.

"I want to do the most I can for you," he said drearily. "But just as you like—we'll alter that, then. Tell me what to say about your voice."

She had made purchases for the part the previous afternoon at a shop that catered specially for ladies of her profession, and presently the box was delivered. She flew to it and wrestled with the string; she had never possessed such expensive lingerie before. Lingham cut the knot for her, and she drew out some stockings, smiling.

There were three pairs, of different tints, to tone with the costumes that she wore; and there were voluminous garments of peculiar design. He touched these curiously.

"They're beautifully made," she murmured, lowering her eyes. And indeed they were; but he realised that the world was to see them on her, and he turned nearly as white as the lace.

He took his notice to the office after luncheon —sherry and some sandwiches; their dinner-hour was to be five, to suit Meenie. He was conscious that Mrs. Watkins treated him with increased respect since he had acquired the drawing-room floor and she understood that his wife was one of the principal ladies at the Piccadilly.

His ticket was for the dress-circle, and when the curtain rose he was glad that—the notice being written—he could let his thoughts wander from the entertainment without restraint. He was obsessed by the knowledge that Meenie moved somewhere behind the glittering mysteries across the footlights—that presently Meenie would be among the fantastic throng that pirouetted on the stage. Now that he was in the theatre the circumstances bewildered him a little; there was a breath of unreality in the situation until he sat looking at her.

Avid of every lesson she could glean, she had

made him promise to tell her exactly what he felt; and the first thing he felt as she ran to the public's stare was a sick shame. But he would not tell her that. There was nothing immodest in her dress, viewing it as a burlesque costume; there was nothing indelicate in her part, regarding it as the part of anybody else. But she was his wife! And her exposure of her limbs, and her coquetries to the crowd, and the familiarities of the painted tenor, struck him hard.

She called the comic pastrycook "darling," and they were supposed to marry. He put his arm round her waist, and kissed her. The kiss was not real, but the clasp was. Her husband told himself that so a man might have clasped her in a ballroom, but his heart was hot. A vulgar, brainless mime, the "pastrycook"! But he earned fifteen hundred a year, and could support the woman he had married, if he wished to. Only he, the lauded literary man, was impotent to do that! Of what good was such talent as his? It was an affliction, for it incapacitated him for any useful work. Of what value was the recognition of a cultured Press? The "pastrycook" could snap his fingers at it.

During the second entr'acte he went to the buffet. He had made a few acquaintances among the dramatic critics by now, and if it had been

possible, he would have begged one or two of them to write of Meenie as kindly as they could. It was beyond him; he could not nerve himself to confess that he was letting his wife do this thing. What would they say? "Certainly, my dear fellow!" And behind his back: "Must be a bit of a cad, you know." Yes, he was a cad—he said it; he felt that he was—or seemed—a cad; but he was helpless. In what calling could he earn more than he was being paid? Could he ask her to relinquish her salary, and her prospects, to pig with him on his thirty shillings a week? He shrank to a corner, and listened to the mingled comments of strangers who came up for whisky-and-soda and cigarettes:

"Not half bad! I like the music. It's very catchy. . . ."

"Yes, by Jove! isn't she?"

"Which do you mean?"

"The girl who plays—you know! What's her name?"

"Meenie Weston. . . ."

"Oh, very poor! There hasn't been a tune yet. Vanderhoff's a fraud."

"Take care. That's his brother-in-law behind you."

"I say, Meenie Weston is agreeable to con-

template, eh? Where does she come from? I'll have a liqueur."

"Did you notice her hands? She's got no rings on."

"One. Married."

"Oh, that doesn't count!"

At the end of the performance he went up the side-street and waited for her at the stage-door. There were several young men in evening dress meeting ladies at the stage door; they appeared to find it more amusing than he. He realised that much depended on the relationship. She came out—a little, tremulous girl, eager for his praise—and they rattled homeward in a hansom. He stared before him blankly.

"Well?" she faltered.

What could he say?

"Was I—all right?"

"You were very good, dear," he said, "very good indeed." His tone was lifeless.

The warmth of success left her. All the elation, the excitement of the crisis, died in her veins. She had wanted him to hold her close and say she had astonished him. During the months on tour she had looked forward to his saying that. He had spoken too strongly last year for her to be puzzled, but she was hurt. Of necessity he had concurred at last, and she was doing her best.

And she had spared him the recital of many incidents that he would have been pained to hear. It had not been roses all the way for her, though she had hidden the scratches. She would have worked her fingers to the bone for him; but she wanted them kissed.

The hansom stopped, and they mounted the dark stairs silently. When he wrote his notice she had pictured a joyous supper to-night, and she had given the landlady money to get a bottle of champagne. As he turned up the gas, Lingham saw it. It was a revelation. With a flood of pity for them both, he understood, and the disappointment that he had inflicted tightened his own throat.

"What, champagne?" he said, trying to throw gaiety into his voice.

Her reply was indistinct, and she moved from him, gulping. She found the sight of the table pathetic, and his exclamation made is worse.

"Meenie! What's the matter?"

"My head aches," she murmured, taking off her hat. "I don't think I want any supper; I'm tired."

"No supper? A banquet, and you aren't going to eat? Nonsense. Remember the occasion! Come and sit down."

She drooped by the mantelshelf, her back to-

wards him. He went over to her slowly, and stroked her hair.

"Oh!" she cried, falling to his shoulder, "why should it be like this, Ralph?"

He held her remorsefully; he could find no words.

"I—I didn't say enough," he stammered at last. "I thought you knew. You—— Everybody thought you were very clever."

"No, no, it isn't that! It's the way you look at it. I see! . . . What will it mean—what is our life going to be—if you feel like this about it always?"

He noted with a pang that she no longer said, "It's only for a little while." She had had success since she urged that—and he had had more failures.

"I'll grow sensible," he answered, labouredly light; "I'll be good! Be patient with me; it's a little difficult for a man to be kept by his wife and to like it."

" 'Kept'!" Her eyes dilated. "Oh, you make it horrible!"

"Well, my dear, it *is* 'kept.' I . . . God knows you're an angel. I appreciate. You do it all as sweetly as a woman could. I notice a good many things I don't mention; you do your best to make me forget where my thirty shillings

leave off and your five pounds begin, but facts are facts. Without you I should be back in my attic, and I should have dinner in Wardour Street for a bob. With you——. You can't expect me to be proud of the position."

"Is it impossible," she said thickly, "for you to think of us as one? *I* do. *I* didn't feel humiliated when you took me out of the pension, and fed and clothed me. If you say it's wicked that, with work like mine, I should earn more than you can with your books, I am with you heart and soul; but your triumphs will come—we know they will come—can't you be glad with me about *my* little penny triumphs in the meanwhile?"

They had married; and behind the marriage the wife did not look. With tenderness, with sympathy, with discernment she looked at all that was needful—at the present. She reflected that it was compulsory for her to work; she reflected that even were she to take a situation in a shop, the fruit of her work would still be bitter in his mouth; she reflected that he was preparing unhappiness for them both by complaining of the inevitable. But—being his wife—she did not reflect that he needn't have married her at all; and this was the thought that underlay the man's depression now. He might have kept single and

retained his self-respect. He felt that in marrying he had been unfair to her and to himself.

But he would not harp on the thought. He drew her to the table, and simulating cheerfulness, uncorked her wine.

## CHAPTER XXI

THE opera ran merrily in town, and whenever his duties as a dramatic critic left him free Lingham brought his wife home. At a quarter to eleven he dropped his pen—snapping a thread of thought—and hurried to the Piccadily to meet her as she came out. He would have it so, though she assured him that it was needless, that she was used to coming out of a stage-door and taking care of herself. She did not tell him that the insult from which he was so eager to protect her often awaited her inside the door—he heard nothing of notes that she destroyed half-read in her dressing-room.

Neither had referred again to his discontent. As thoroughly as it could be, the subject had been threshed out between them, and after the night of confession it was tabooed. Their conversation had placed them in each other's arms, and she tried to believe that they remained there. She tried very hard.

The man, on his side, had for a few days striven to maintain a complacent front, and with inten-

tion he did not drop it; he did not put it from him as a mask too irksome to be worn; he let it slip unconsciously. He was not conscious at the beginning of the irritability of his tone that so often wounded her. In his resentful reveries he was at infinite pains to discriminate between her and circumstances, but he did not manifest discrimination by his behaviour. Those who tell a man that he can keep back an insistent thought are as fatuous as they who said, "Keep back the tide"; the thought that Lingham had vowed to restrain flowed in upon him every day. Their marriage had been a mistake for both. Her it had not enriched, and him it had left poor indeed. Slurring the fact that she owed her advancement to his introduction, he said that she would have done just as well without him. He said that the girl whom he had rescued from a den in Paris would have succeeded anyhow—that by their precipitous marriage she had gained nothing except a husband who lived on her earnings. As for himself—— He was quite alive to the pathos of the situation, but he knew she wasn't so dear to him when she was putting forth her best endeavours as when she had been helplessly affectionate; poverty had entered, and its presence chilled him no less because his wife could avert its grip. As for himself, he could not pretend

that her companionship compensated for his humiliation. The secret thought acted upon him like a secret vice, and irritable tones developed into hasty words, and from hasty words sprang quick remonstrances.

Perhaps, although she did not know it, she was outwardly a shade less tolerant than she had been. She would have abhorred herself to think that the turn of the wheel had dizzied her, but it was natural that she should stand higher in her self-esteem than formerly; she was less disposed to bow her neck to ill-temper and rebukes.

And as the months went by, he was constantly ill-tempered. He was sorry that he had married her before he could afford it. He gave her credit for all the virtues; he owned that her disposition was sweeter, that her character was nobler than his own; but he was sorry that he had married, and few men can conceal such regret with the amiable hypocrisy of women.

One Saturday in July, before she left for the theatre, she stood for a moment on the balcony. Inside, Lingham had just sat down to his novel. The day had been despairingly hot, and the sight of the arid length of Guilford Street filled her with a sudden craving for the sea. It was eight o'clock; the dinner-bells of the boarding-houses had jangled an hour ago, and now at the win-

dows, and on the doorsteps, the dull-faced clerks fanned themselves in the gathering quietude of twilight. She pictured the sea as it would look when the moon rose. The longing to behold it thrilled her, and she bent back under the window impulsively.

"Ralph, it's Saturday!" she exclaimed; "couldn't we go away somewhere to-night after the show and spend to-morrow at the seaside?"

A physical pain shot through his head at the interruption; every nerve in the man jumped. The bridge his thoughts had been spinning fell to air; on a sudden his mind was as blank as the paper. He put his pen down with an elaborate gesture of renunciation, and leant back in the chair.

"Go away somewhere?" he echoed. By his tone she might have suggested a trip round the world. "What do you mean, 'Go away somewhere'?"

"It's so hot," she murmured. "There's a late train to Brighton. I could send a wire to an hotel before I went into the theatre, and we needn't come back till Monday afternoon. It wouldn't cost very much, and it would do us good."

"Brighton? In July? Yes, it would do us a lot of good! Have you any idea what Brighton

is like in July? You talk like a child; you don't consider. It's hotter there than here."

She bit her lip. "Well, think of another place, then—I don't mind where we go."

"What do you want to go anywhere for? We haven't an *A.B.C.*—I don't think we could get a train anywhere else so late. Besides, I've got my work to do. Don't you know how slowly I'm getting on? I haven't the time to go out of town."

"Oh, very well," she said sharply. "It would make a great difference if you spared a day and a half."

He wanted to swear, so he clenched his hands and beat them on the table.

"It isn't a day and a half!" he cried; "you know just as well as I do that if I take a day off at the wrong time it costs me a week. By Heaven, it's an extraordinary thing that a woman never learns! . . . All right, all right! We'll go. Where do you want to go—Brighton? All right, pack your bag; I'll pack mine presently."

"Oh, no," she said; "we'll stay at home, thank you."

"Don't be silly," said Lingham; "you want to go away, and it's arranged. I've told you I'll do it."

"I don't want to go away. Don't say any more about it."

"Oh!"—he brought his fist down on the table with a crash—"you're maddening! You are! You're maddening! You burst in upon me with some stupid whim; you send all my ideas out of my head; and then when I tell you—when I tell you—that I'll go, you don't want to! What does it matter to me whether we do, or don't now? I suppose you think I can go on with my work as if you hadn't spoken? I'm not a machine. *I* can't make a living by prancing on the stage and speaking somebody else's words—I've got to find my own. I don't know what I was writing about, I don't know what I was going to say, everything's gone. Whether I go to Brighton, or whether I stop here, you've ruined my evening. For Heaven's sake make up your mind what you do want before you talk about it. This sort of thing is killing."

"You're quite right," she said, with a gasp; "it is. Killing! Every day—a dozen times a day, if I took notice of it—you speak to me as if I were your worst enemy. I can't bear it, Ralph. I don't think you know—I don't think you *can* know—how you behave. You rage about trifles. You blame me for everything—you seem to like to blame me—it seems to be your one relief. I

can't say a word to you any more; I'm afraid to open my mouth."

"Oh, you are very hardly used," said Lingham bitterly.

There was a momentary pause. Outside, an itinerant harpist swept the strings, and sent up to them a love-song.

"Whatever I do or say," she stammered, "it is wrong now. If I ask you how you are getting on, it is wrong; if I don't ask you how you are getting on, it is wrong. God knows I try to do right, but we don't agree any more—it seems as if we can't! I've told you before that your temper is spoiling our lives."

"Once or twice," he said.

"But not so often as I have felt it."

"I'm very sorry," he returned, a little shamefaced, "but I really don't know what I can do; I'm afraid I'm rather old to improve."

"*I*'m not a machine either. If you could remember it, we should be happier; *I* have nerves, too, though I do make a living on the stage by speaking somebody else's words."

"I wasn't referring to you," he muttered.

"You were!" she cried. "You sneered at me. I think sometimes you hate me since I've been on the stage."

"Oh, don't talk such rot! You make a mountain out of a mole-hill."

"Yes, it is always a 'mole-hill' after you have done. I know! I am never to answer, I am never to feel—the nerves, the anger, the reproaches are all to be yours. And when you've done, when you've stamped on me, and bruised my heart, it's a 'mole-hill.' It isn't fair, it isn't possible. I'm a woman—you ought to have married a child!"

"Or nobody," he said behind his teeth.

" 'Or nobody'!" she repeated; "that would have been best."

She stared beyond him passionately. The howl of the harpist filled the room with incongruous sentiment.

Lingham frowned, and strode to and fro.

"These scenes are just as painful to me as to you," he exclaimed. "You tell me I'm a brute: I'm not a brute intentionally. I—— Look here, you'll be late; go and put your things together at once—go on. And I'll send a wire to the hotel."

She shook her head.

"Why not?"

"It would be no pleasure now."

"Then sulk!" he shouted. "You've said everything you could think of, and now you want to

pose as a martyr. I wish I were dead. You used to have a good temper."

"My temper is what you are making it," she said.

She hurried from him with a sob; he glared after her savagely. At the kerb the harpist roared:

> "'I need no moon, no sun, to guide me
> While I gaze in your dear heyes.'"

"Oh, be damned for a yarn!" said Lingham, and banged the window down.

## CHAPTER XXII

When the wife exclaims more and more frequently, "We don't get on together any longer!" and the husband is girding at the tie, only family considerations are likely to avert a crisis. These two were without family considerations. They had no child to serve as link; they had no relatives who would regard their separation as a scandal. Lingham often reflected that, to himself at least, an amicable separation would come as an intense relief if he had the courage to propose it. Yet he shrank from proposing it. He hesitated because, though their life was one of daily friction, the measure would sound a violent remedy to suggest for a comparatively small ill. He was deterred also, and chiefly, by the very fact that had originated the desire—the fact of her being on the stage. She was in a calling beset by temptations, and she had returned to it with his consent. It was his duty to uphold her by every means in his power. It was his duty to swallow his chagrin and to stand by her till the time came when his work would suffice to support

them. And—whether he liked it or not—if she should be loth then to relinquish the position he had been compelled to let her seek, it would be his duty to stand by her still.

That was his duty, his unpalatable, odious duty: to bring her home from the theatre, to share her money, to resign himself to the perception that her throat and ankles were more valuable commodities than his brains—to be "the husband of Miss Meenie Weston." But he was at once too strong and too weak. Sophistry could adduce arguments on the other side. When she went on tour she did *return* to the stage. His embarrassments had not driven her to it, a novice—it had been her profession before she met him; and the episode of a reckless marriage in no way accentuated the drawbacks of the world to which she belonged. Her life would be the life she had led when accident threw them together. Far better! For she had been out of her depth at that moment, and his arm had saved her. And she would be in receipt of a good salary, instead of a poor one. Here he did allow himself to dwell on the introduction that had been her Open Sesame, and he argued that she would have no cause to complain of having married him. No cause if he found the courage to be candid before her tears had dulled her prettiness—if he did not

prolong his blunder till it became their curse!

*A Ring o' Roses* bloomed and faded, and a few days after a notice on the call-board apprised the company that the run would terminate in a fortnight's time, she was offered an engagement at the Folly.

Her salary was to be eight pounds a week, and if the production proved a success, she thought that she and Lingham would be justified in taking the flat that "Miss Stewart" was now trying so hard to let. The accountant had died—her expectation of home life, free from debt, had ended with his illness—and suddenly she stood alone, and she could not afford the rent. Meenie reflected that in their own place Lingham would be able to write more peacefully—that their own servant would banish from existence a hundred annoyances which tips to a lodging-house drudge could only abate. Like him, she looked ahead with misgivings. She could no longer keep her eyes bent solely on the present, and there were hours when to consider their future made her tremble. But when she married him he was a stranger idealised in the limelight of circumstance; to-day he was real, human, a part of herself. The maternal element in every woman's love for man was in this woman intensified slightly by the fact that she had no child to be

mother to—greatly by the fact of the man's helplessness. Though he had grown tetchy and embittered, she was patient more often than she was reproachful; though the thought of the future dismayed her, the suggestion of separating would never have been hers.

But it was on the night that she mentioned her project to him that he wrenched the truth out. She spoke of it after supper. The opera was in its last week, and rehearsals of *Japonica Jones* at the Folly had already begun.

"Meenie," he said, "I think you'd be much happier without me. We—we can't blink the matter—we don't agree; you are always saying so, and it's true. What's the good of going on with it?"

Her lips moved, but no sound came, and he wasn't looking at her.

"It's no fault of yours," he added nervously; "the circumstances are wrong. I can't resign myself to being kept by you—I never shall. That's the root of all our differences. What's the good of going on with it?"

"You want us to live apart?" she faltered.

"Wouldn't it be better for us both? Let us look at it sensibly; we needn't make a tragedy of it. I should like to think we could be friends. . . . But I had no right to marry you. I had

no right to marry anybody, least of all a woman on the stage. I can work till I die without earning as much as you are paid already—and with every engagement you get more."

"Next time I mayn't get so much," she put in plaintively.

"I've failed," he exclaimed; "I'm thirty-seven, and I've failed; you are twenty-four, and you're succeeding! What promise is there in the future? The wife who makes money, and the husband a failure. I'm not the man to bear it well—I've tried. I'm too small-minded, too ungenerous, too anything you like to call me—but I can't do it. What shall we look forward to? We should get on worse together every year."

"I suppose so," she said; "we should get on worse together every year."

He took a turn about the room.

"I can't give you back your liberty, unfortunately—you'll still be my wife; but if we separated, at any rate you would have peace. Better to be tied to a man you don't live with than to one who quarrels with you all the time."

"Much better," she said.

"Now you are . . . angry with me?"

"Oh no; all you say is quite right."

She remembered the thoughts that had been in her when she went back to her old life; she

was his comrade, his helpmate, joying to do her best. This was what had come of it! By his own words their wretchedness was due to her devotion. That he should have said it made the knowledge bitterer. A hot resentment swelled her heart.

"All you say is quite right," she repeated. "We made a mistake; it is better we should own it."

"If we can look at the thing in the right spirit," said the man more cheerfully, "we shall both be grateful that we talked it out. Yes, we made a mistake, but there's no reason why we should part with—enmity. I should like to be of all the use I could to you always. . . . I don't know why we should be strangers to each other because we can't get on together under the same roof? . . . Of course, that must be as you wish. But anyhow, I should like to feel that you would turn to me if you wanted anything that I could do for you."

She was silent. He filled a pipe, and drew at it in quick pulls.

"That must be as you wish," he said again, looking at her askance.

"I don't understand what you mean," she said stonily; "you don't know 'why we should be strangers'?"

"I mean I don't know why we should never speak to each other any more. I . . . we can't tear the past out by the roots; we married; you may need a man's help. Why shouldn't I see you —as a friend—sometimes?"

She took a long breath.

"We can't play at this, Ralph. I've tried to be a good wife to you; I've suffered more than you know lately; I've suffered enough to feel that you've proposed the best course, though I don't think I should ever have proposed it myself. I might. . . . I can't say; perhaps I should have in time! Once I wouldn't have believed I could agree to it so readily. We are parting because I have made you unhappy——"

"Not—not you," he stammered; "circumstances."

"Oh, let us call things by their right names—because I have made you unhappy! Then let's part. You live your life, and I'll live mine. You needn't worry about me; I wasn't a child when we met, and I've learnt a good deal since then. You needn't worry about my not having my 'liberty' either; you mean, I suppose, that I can't marry again? I shall never want to marry again, Ralph."

"You have had enough of it," he said, "eh?"

"Yes, I have had enough of it."

She played with a book, and put it down—took it up and opened it to hide her eyes. There was a long silence. The last lodger to come in made the door fast, and mounted the stairs, and threw his boots out on the landing.

"When had it better be?" she asked abruptly.

Lingham started.

"There's no hurry, I suppose? You . . . it would be best for us to leave at the same time, wouldn't it? If you are going to take the flat, I'll arrange the matter for you."

"There will be nothing for you to arrange," she said—"I shall live there with Miss Stewart; she will be very glad to have me. The sooner the better now. I shall go to see her in the morning."

"Just as you like," he answered.

The clock struck one. She put the book aside and got up.

"I'm going to bed," she said; "good-night."

He rose and opened the door for her—and she felt that they were no longer man and wife. When an hour or two had passed he stretched himself on the sofa. But there were folding-doors to the room too—dividing it from the bedroom—and even when he slept at last, she was afraid to sob lest he should be awake and hear.

## CHAPTER XXIII

His watch had stopped when he opened his eyes to remembrance. By the light, and the look of the street, he saw that it was early. He was horribly tired, but he was glad that he had been disturbed before the servant came in to pull up the blinds.

He put the cushions and the antimacassar straight, and let himself out onto the pavement. The thought of the previous night's scene burdened his mind as he walked, and wretchedly he wished that he were the one going—that the parting were over—that he weren't obliged to enter the house again. The prospect of the breakfast-table, the necessity for playing the scene to a finish in cold blood, made a coward of him.

He had no club to peal at for admission, and he washed for twopence in a public lavatory. When his return could be delayed no longer he lagged home, to find his wife already up. Her pallor shocked him; he looked away as he said "Good-morning."

"Good-morning," she murmured.

Presently the teapot was brought in, and they took their seats. She passed his cup, and he served the bacon. The pretence of eating was very pitiful, and the heavy silence was broken only when one of them said "Thank you." To the man, knowing that he had created the situation, it was even more oppressive than to the woman, whose resentment afforded her some slight support.

After about ten minutes she pushed back her chair, and went into the bedroom. When he followed her she was putting on her hat. Lingham stood by the wardrobe awkwardly, his hands in his pockets.

"Where are you going?"

"To see Miss Stewart," she said. She drove the pin in.

"Look here," he exclaimed, "why should you go off to-day? I thought we were parting because we both felt it was the best thing? You're behaving as if I'd turned you out. It's wrong, it isn't fair. Let's take a few days to—to talk it over. It's damned nonsense, your rushing out of the place like this. It's ridiculous."

"What is there to talk over?" she replied unsteadily. "We've settled it."

"Settled it? We can't separate at an hour's

notice. . . . Take your hat off; if we're going to part, let's part like sensible people."

"There's nothing to be gained by—— We're both of the same mind as we were last night." She paused for a second. "If Miss Stewart is willing to have me—and I'm sure she will be—I'd rather go at once. I'm not behaving at all as if—in the way you say. It's because we do both feel it's for the best that there's nothing more to be said about it. We've nobody to consult; we've only ourselves to think about. Every day we waited now—— Why should we be weak? You must see what it would be like . . . it would be awful; you must see it!" Her voice quavered.

He did see it; he had not lost sight of it while he spoke; but there was the aversion from her going so suddenly, although he wished she had already gone. He stared at the ground, wondering what to say next. There was a knock, and Mrs. Watkins put her head in, and inquired if she might make the bed. Meenie said, "Yes, you can come in, Mrs. Watkins." He did not know whether he was sorry or relieved; he lounged back to the drawing-room.

The afternoon was unspeakably painful. Diffident of offering to accelerate her preparations, he paced the floor, listening to the sounds of her

packing behind the folding-doors, and knowing how troublesome a task she always found it. At last he rang the bell and gave the little servant a shilling to go to help her.

Even when one's world is represented by a landlady one studies appearances; he wished he knew what explanation Meenie had made, and decided to say nothing himself, for fear of contradicting it. He winced to realise that he was considering so trivial a matter at such a crisis, but all the same, he meant to leave before he could be embarrassed by questions.

Meenie came in from the bedroom with her hat and gloves on; she wore a veil, though to wear a veil was not her custom.

"Good-bye," she said.

"Good-bye." He hesitated, and they looked at each other. Her hand moved incipiently, and he put out his own.

Each wished from the depths of a heart that she had gone.

He followed her down the stairs. She hurried into the cab, with an inward prayer that he would not speak to her again at the window. The servant repeated her instructions to the driver, and Lingham wondered what they were: to Miss Stewart's, or—more tactfully—a railway-station? Mrs. Watkins was in the passage, and as

he turned, she said, "Lor, sir, it *is* sudden, isn't it?" He said, "Yes, very!" and passed her, shamed. He could still hear the wheels.

He knew that it was only sentiment—that to-morrow relief would come; but there was a lump in his throat, and the room seemed strangely empty all at once. He looked round the other, and his mouth twitched; the absence of familiar things was poignant to him. He hated himself in the consciousness that he had no right to the knot in his throat, and the blur before his gaze; he would have thanked Heaven for the right just then—thanked Heaven as he stood there, to feel that the pathos of the sight would endure, that he wasn't moved by the transient tenderness of the moment. The knowledge that he was, forbade him to grieve while grief filled his eyes; he sickened at his own emotion. "O God," he said, "what am I? I am not even true to myself!" But he had been too true to himself from first to last, for no man can jilt his temperament.

It was his temperament that made him flee the house before she had been gone an hour; and it was his temperament that took him out of an attic in Doughty Street to the gallery of the Piccadilly the same night. There, he looked across the crowd at the wife from whom he had just parted for life; and the woman whose life

had been rent in two that afternoon sang "Consequential Carrie" to guffaws.

He did not go to the theatre again. After a few days he felt, as he had known he would feel, a returning sense of tranquillity. And on the fourth-floor flat, half a mile away, the women who had both lost their husbands made their home together.

## CHAPTER XXIV

It was well for Meenie that she had her profession; it was better for her that she had been so fortunate in it. If she had been without occupation, or tramping to the agents' offices now, she would have been wholly miserable. As she rallied from the wrench—as the fierceness of the first pain faded—she was not miserable. She could not be happy; she had loved him too well, her pride had been wounded too cruelly for her to be happy; but she found interest in her pursuits, and tried to feel interest in her future.

She had attracted notice; it was shown by the offer from the Folly of a part which had been a distinct advance; in the course of the next few years she might reasonably expect to attain a prominent position—a position in which she would attract more notice still. Here was a situation in which there seemed to be all the potentialities of sexual disaster. She was a woman so young that it was natural to suppose she would one day love again, and she was debarred from marriage. We read that man was not made to

live alone, but Adam had very few resources, and observation shows us that in the present age the statement applies much better to woman. Many men are made to live alone, though they rarely find it out till too late. The average woman needs tenderness, as the average man needs tobacco. To her it is not a distraction, it is a daily necessity—as was said long ago in a couplet. It was not surprising that Meenie failed to consider the contingency at this period; it is not possible to declare that time might not have tempted her—one answers for the unforeseen only at the altar; but it is difficult to believe that she would ever have succumbed.

The little girl, with her blue eyes and her gentle voice, was strong, or she would have fallen long before she met the man she married. The potentialities were for all to see, but beneath lay the force of character that had already served her well. And she had another safeguard—she loved him and it would take her many years to forget.

*Japonica Jones* ran till the spring, and during all the months she had no glimpse, or word of him. Often when she was out she trembled to think that they might come face to face—she could not have sworn whether she feared or hoped that it might happen; but, though they

missed each other by ten minutes a dozen times, they never met.

She took in *The Daily Chronicle,* and, before she sat down to breakfast, looked for the "Writers and Readers" column. Dynasties might totter, but it would always be the "Writers and Readers" column that she looked for first; it promised her more excitement than any cablegram. Though the promise was never kept, the literary page was dear to her, because she knew that it was read regularly by Lingham. It even pleased her to imagine the sentiments with which he read each morning. Sometimes she could hear him give off his short laugh—rather like a bark, that laugh, though it had its melody in remembrance—and then their division was bridged by the thought that they were appreciating the same thing at the same hour.

At last, in April, she saw his name under "Received To-day," and sped prematurely to the Strand to buy the book. Athirst, she obtained a copy at the publisher's. The opening chapters had been written before he cast her off, and her keenest emotion lay in reading the rest. The work that followed was the voice, the mind, of him after she had gone; and she pored over it, tracing the rills of reflection to their source, listening for murmurs of significance that were not

there—peering between the lines into the mood from which they flowed.

Because she was very fond of her friend—and eager to hear Ralph praised—she lent the novel to her. Because her friend was very fond of Meenie—and disposed to see no merit in anything her husband did—she said limply that it was "all right." They had never come so near to sharp words.

Nor did they ever come so near again. Actors and actresses can seldom foretell their movements long ahead. To-day they may be settled in London, and to-morrow preparing to go to the Antipodes; allusions to Melbourne or New York fall as trippingly from their tongues as addresses in Brighton or Bow; and one night when Miss Stewart came in from the theatre where she was playing there was food for discussion.

"My dear," exclaimed Meenie, as she entered, "what do you think I have been offered this evening?"

"Lead at the Lane," said Miss Stewart promptly, for she could make a joke now; "you have such a commanding presence!"

"They're sending *Japonica* to New York in the autumn, and they have asked me if I would like to go over with it. I don't know what to say. . . . I don't think I should."

"Why not?" asked the other. "It would be the best thing for you. Why shouldn't you go?"

To put the Atlantic between herself and Lingham was one objection, but the woman was loth to acknowledge that, even in her thoughts.

"I should miss you so," she said.

"You'll probably miss me anyhow. I don't expect I shall be able to stay long in town; when I'm on tour you'll have the flat to yourself."

"And that's another thing," said Meenie. "What about the flat? It costs a lot to live in New York, doesn't it? I don't know if I should be able to pay my share of the rent while I was away."

"Well, of course you wouldn't pay your share while you were away. What an idea! Besides, if you go, I shan't renew the agreement. I've been thinking. I don't want the place, seeing that I shall be in the provinces six or eight months out of the year. I'm not like you—you'll come back to the West End; you're getting on."

"I shall owe a lot of it to you, if I do; you have taught me heaps, Lucy. It's funny——" She hesitated.

"Oh, you may say it," said Miss Stewart. "It's funny that I can tell you how things ought to be done, though I'm not able to do them myself. You'll find plenty of people in the profession like

that. I've the instinct—I see how an effect can be made—but when I try to make it myself, I'm awkward. If you imitated me you would be awkward, too, but you don't; you see what I mean, and do it gracefully. . . . Now don't be a goose; tell them to-morrow that you'll go. What are the terms?"

"I didn't ask. I suppose they ought to be more to go to America, oughtn't they?"

"Certainly they ought; it's always more for America. And you had better buy everything you're likely to want before you sail—and wear it first, too—clothes cost a fortune in the States. . . . A change like that is just what you need; it will keep you from brooding."

"I don't brood," said Meenie, flushing; "I don't know why you should say such a thing."

But she knew perfectly, and it was for this reason—because she despised herself for clinging to the city that held her husband—that she found the courage to say "yes" next day.

Many times during the summer she wished that she had not; once or twice, but for the fear of betraying her weakness to Miss Stewart, she would have tried to annul the contract. As September drew near, her aversion increased. She was going with strangers to a strange country, and leaving behind everything except bitter mem-

ories. Now she would have cancelled the contract and defied her friend's rebukes, but it was too late. It seemed to her that, alone and so far away, her thoughts would be harder to bear. She hoped that America would scorn the production and that the company would be sent back in a week.

One evening, when her departure was very near indeed, an impulse was too strong to be denied, and carelessly—so carelessly that the other had no suspicion—she proposed a stroll. The two women sauntered round Russell Square into Southampton Row, and came to the big lamp-post of Guilford Street. Now the elder understood, and affected unconsciousness of where she was being led. Meenie turned the corner, talking rapidly; it was the first time she had entered the street since the afternoon last year when she drove away. The hotel was much higher now, but, beyond, the road was being mended, as usual, and she could see patches of familiar scaffolding.

Presently they approached the house. Miss Stewart, who remembered the number very well, was silent. Meenie looked lingeringly at the windows. Behind the dirty curtains the gaselier was ablaze; she wondered who lived in the rooms now. Her footsteps lagged—she would have liked to

stop; the house was passed too quickly, and she felt a new sense of loss.

When they reached the Foundling, Miss Stewart said:

"Shall we turn back? I'm rather tired."

"Just as you like," answered Meenie, careless too.

And though Miss Stewart knew, and Meenie knew that she must know, neither admitted to the other by any words that they had not been taking an aimless walk. Only they were quieter than usual when they sat at home again; and when they said good-night Meenie put her arms round her friend's neck and kissed her.

## CHAPTER XXV

To Lingham, the year during which Meenie lived with Miss Stewart had not been void of instruction. After that returning sense of tranquillity—after his renewed enjoyment in work which again sufficed for his needs—he had learnt that the past was irrecoverable. In theory he had known it; in practice it was a strange lesson. He had set back the clock, but he had not regained the spirit of the time. He had shaken himself free, but the buoyancy of freedom was absent. His wife had gone; materially his life was the life of the period before he knew her; but externals could no more restore the serenity of the period to him than to play with a top could make him feel fourteen.

At first the knowledge of his loneliness was fitful; he shrank from regret as he had shrunk from it in the hour of the good-bye, distrustful of his own emotions. It was slowly he awoke to the perception that though he might draw a chair to the hearth and open a book in silence, the contentment of solitude had been outlived. It was

by degrees he realised that though a fool can put a woman's arms from him, only God can still the thought of her.

He missed her; he missed her more than he could credit for a long while. Even while they were happy together, he had not dreamed that her loss would tear so deep a cleft in his life. He had not known she was so dear to him. Perhaps she had not been so dear. And because she was still living she throbbed in his memory always. If he had lost her by death, his world would have blossomed over the fissure sooner; when the lips are dumb, the echoes grow faint; but alive, she haunted him.

As long as she was playing in town he could know that she was not ill; and while she remained at the Folly the *Chronicle's* advertisement of the theatre showed him her name each day. As the woman had sought regularly for his in the "Writers and Readers" column, so the man looked for hers on the fourth page. And every morning he read that his wife was well—under the clock that completed the record of two.

After *Japonica Jones* finished, the *Chronicle* gave him no further news of her. It was when he was denied the daily sight of her name that he realised how precious it had become. The paper was foreign to him, and their division yawned

more blankly. One Saturday he bought *The Era,* and by this he learnt that she had gone to New York. He paled; the paragraph struck him with dismay. Now it seemed to him that while London held them both there had been an impalpable link between them. He re-read the paragraph mechanically a dozen times; and in the consciousness that he could not see her, that all chance of their meeting was removed, he felt forlorn when he went out.

Nor did he ever forget that she had gone from London when he walked. It was revealed to him that hitherto his eyes had been always eager in the streets, that deep in his heart there had lurked a faint expectation of something he had not defined—something that could never happen now. He could throw doubts on his sincerity no longer; he had ceased to try! and he knew that, though he had made a rash marriage, he had loved his wife.

In Oxford Street, one afternoon, he caught sight of Georgina, and darted under the horses' heads to avoid her. She would want to call, and it would be odious to have to explain the circumstances, or tell her falsehoods. Through the winter he often bought *The Era* or *The Stage,* but he gathered no tidings of Meenie from either. Between him and Parlett her name was never

mentioned, and he remained ignorant whether she had come back to England or not. Then, with the spring, his interest in New York was emphasised by a surprising letter, forwarded to him by Mr. Alport. It was as if his luck had turned too late:

"HAWTHORNE THEATRE,
"NEW YORK, N.Y.

"DEAR SIR,

"I have read with much enjoyment your novel called *Angela Brown, Publisher*. It might be converted into a very entertaining comedy. I should be glad to hear from you by an early mail if you are disposed to submit a dramatic version of your book to me. If you conclude to do so, the MS. shall receive my immediate attention.

"Yours truly,
"ELLIS M'CREA."

Ellis M'Crea was almost as well known to theatrical London as to America. Even Lingham had often heard him mentioned. He was the manager of two of the principal theatres of New York, and the fountain-head of a score of dramatic enterprises. No more encouraging invitation could have been received, and the author's impulse was to post the comedy to him at once.

A chat with Parlett, however, made it clear that this would be indiscreet.

"If you do," said the playwright, "you will give it a black eye before he looks at it—he'll guess that it has been refused in twenty quarters already. Say you'll start work on it right off and send a clean copy of it to him in a month's time. Trust to Poppa!"

So Lingham wrote that he would be pleased to submit a stage version of the novel a few weeks hence, and when he came to re-read the version that was made he was thankful that he had taken advice. It was nearly two years since he had studied the manuscript, and he saw scope for various improvements—several lines that appeared to him clumsy; one scene which, after a fortnight of indecision, he decided to eliminate.

It was in the first act. In the book it did not exist; but, though he hated to delete it, he felt that it would have become the book better than the play. It seemed to him too delicate, too literary for the footlights. He dreaded that, coming so early in the piece, it might prejudice M'Crea against the rest. Parlett's warning to him had begotten timidity and he was afraid that if he were tedious in the opening pages, the manuscript might be tossed aside.

He tore the sheets out—only two of them, but

it was like losing his heart's blood. So pretty a scene, although it delayed the entrance of the 'osses! He polished, and re-polished, and scrutinised again; and when the typewriting office had done its work he despatched the four acts to M'Crea, and counted the days.

And in May came another envelope stamped "Hawthorne Theatre, N.Y.C."; and he found, with something like stupefaction—for he would soon be forty and had never had any good fortune in his life—that an agreement was enclosed for his consideration.

With publishers' proposals he was familiar—he had one that he preserved as a curiosity—but of such agreements as this he knew nothing; and now Parlett's experience was invaluable. The coolness with which Parlett ran his pen through clauses, and scribbled figures in the margin, filled the novice at once with gratitude and misgiving; and when it was stipulated that if the piece were not produced within twelve months, a hundred pounds should be forfeited, he began to feel that M'Crea would write a very rude reply.

Nevertheless, M'Crea's native politeness, or the justice of the alterations, averted friction. The amendments were accepted, and by a note that accompanied the new contract Lingham learnt that the comedy was to be put on at the

Hawthorne as early as next fall—in another word, the autumn.

He was still unaware whether Meenie had returned. Had he bought the theatrical journals as systematically as he had looked for her name in the newspaper, he would have known where she was. Thinking that she might be playing in New York, the idea of going over there to attend the rehearsals of his piece fascinated him doubly.

There were no monetary difficulties in the way; he was spending little more than his salary, and his recent royalties from Alport would amply suffice for the purpose. The prospect thrilled him. On the public's reception of his piece hung his future, and he would be there to listen to the verdict. He knew that he was building on the play for more than some thousands of pounds, for more than the triumphant entrance to a fresh and lucrative career; he knew that he was building on it to give him back his wife. If it succeeded he would go to her; he would ask her forgiveness; he would own what life had been without her and implore her to trust her happiness to him again. The uneventful summer dragged distressingly. In August he counted the days from mail to mail, and when September reached its end and there was silence still, he could bear the anxiety no longer. He wrote an eager inquiry. He was

startled to learn by the answer that his comedy was already in rehearsal.

Though he had not informed the manager of his intention to go over, he had taken it for granted that he would hear from him in good time. He was chagrined to feel that he had lost many sweet days. He was, however, more chagrined in the course of a few hours, for soon afterwards a cablegram was delivered stating that another play was to be the next production, after all.

Another! He flung the message in the fender with a gasp. Parlett had known his world! Yes, and very likely another, and yet another play, would be put on first. After his hopes and thanksgivings and expectations, all he might get out of the contract was the forfeit. Fortunately he had not booked a berth, but his disappointment blackened the sunshine to him. When he went to the office Mr. Hunt said, "How soon do you mean to start, Lingham?" The question was a lance. In the evening he received some clothes that had been ordered in anticipation of his journey, and he mused bitterly that they would be worn out before the journey was made.

A month passed. And when confidence was reviving in him and he was beginning to put faith in the spring, there came a second cablegram:

"Produce *Angela* sixteenth instant—M'Crea."

In the first few moments he only knew that the date was convulsively near; then he made out that it meant a Wednesday—that it meant a week from the morrow. He was a little dizzy. So the other man's play had proved a failure? He had not taken that contingency into account. He tried to be sorry for him, but rejoicing flooded his soul. He ran from the house and sprang into a hansom, and secured a passage by a boat that sailed the following afternoon. The clerk told him that she was due in New York on Tuesday. He might miss the last of the rehearsals, but he would arrive in time for the first night!

Mr. Hunt bade him au revoir, and wished him luck. In Belsize Avenue there were more congratulations. His packing was the work of half an hour, and in the morning, as he sped to Euston, the jingle of the horse's bell made music to his ears.

Liverpool. The crowd of tired spectators at the intermediate taffrail, the yawning hold, the shouts ashore, the bustle and the questions on the boat. Everywhere the American accent. Would these people see his play? He was led to his cabin, and wondered how he would contrive to find it again. He returned to the deck; confusion reigned there still. Why didn't the boat

start? He was irritated by the view across the vessel's side, eager to feel that they moved. . . . There was the welcome throb, the receding quay. The voyage had begun.

But abortively. There came the stoppage at Queenstown, the delay there, the disconcerting news that the brilliant passages of five days and a half were reckoned from Queenstown, and not from Liverpool. "Why ignore the eighteen intervening hours?" he demanded; "everybody didn't live in Ireland." "Ocean steaming!" he was answered, and tried to persuade himself that he had just come aboard.

Still they were to land on Tuesday. So let them hang about the ports—what did it matter? When they had finished fooling and torn themselves away, they must go to work and make the time good. After the morning on which he learnt that the day's run was posted at noon for the satisfaction of the curious and the settlement of sweepstakes, he was always among the first who bolted down the companion to see what it had been. When it fell from four hundred and fifty-six knots to four hundred and forty-four, his spirits fell in proportion.

And on Sunday the boat stopped again. What for now? No one knew. He sauntered to and fro, fuming. Two hours, three hours crept by

before she moved. He prayed that the next run posted would equalise matters, but he trembled; and when he looked on Monday it had fallen to figures of dismay. The other men dispersed, grumbling. The appearance of the captain was the signal for loungers to quicken their steps, and women in deck-chairs to drop their books and for everybody to say, "When do you think we shall get in, Captain?"

Impatience quivered in Lingham. The thought of landing on the morrow was dead, and already he was sick with the fear that they might not arrive by Wednesday night. There were moments when the lethargic pulsations of the sluggish steamer maddened him; when the limitless waste of sunlit sea filled him with rage. His play! Suspense fevered his blood; the curtain might rise on his play before he was there.

Then he understood. He heard that there was a flaw in the propeller-shaft and that to steam slowly was their only chance of avoiding a breakdown. His sole comfort was that the flaw had not occurred earlier in the voyage: they might touch New York by Wednesday still. In the afternoon —the evening? In time for him to reach the theatre? In time, at least, for him to see half the play? Then the last act, if no more? Oh God, be merciful: the last act if nothing else! They

must be so close, so close! A spurt might do it. Couldn't they make a spurt? He wrung his hands. What if they did break down? Near the harbour it would be cheap enough to be towed in.

And leisurely, leisurely, the steamer took her course; and Wednesday's sunshine faded, and the moon rose—and they were still at sea. Beyond the sullen water the theatre was filling. He leant for'ard in the silence, tense with the fancied tuning of the band. Over there his work was fighting for his wife; he stared through the gloom, imagining, questioning. Were there hisses, or applause? On a sudden he remembered reading that in New York an audience were too courteous to hiss—they stole from their seats; perhaps the people were stealing from them now. The sweat burst out on him, and he quaked in his very soul.

He looked at his watch; the first act must be over! Starboard, where he walked, was deserted; a chill wind swept it, and the men who were not below smoked on the other side. Hour after hour he paced the deck alone, as act by act his play was cheered, or damned. All that evening he shook with the thought that conquest meant his plea to Meenie—that she must, she should forgive! The ship's bells broke sharply on the hush of midnight; the curtain must have fallen now—the lights were out. Had he won, or lost?

The fight was finished—and his wife, the prize! He grew conscious that he was very cold; the stars shone serene, and, shivering, he sought a message in them. All his pulses craved it. Had he won, or lost?

But there was none to tell him till the morrow. When he woke the coast was clear, and the pilot in command. The passengers flocked from their cabins, he with the rest. Around him there was laughter, but he could not laugh; anxiety held him voiceless. America stretched to greet them; the Statue of Liberty rose triumphant in the port. Glasses were levelled, and borrowed. Women disappeared, and returned looking different in feathered hats and veils. The health-boat approached, and grew big; he gasped to hear that the morning papers were inside. Nearer and nearer drew the boat—he could see the white sheaf of dailies under a man's arm. The officers swarmed aboard. There was a clamour for the news. He rushed to where the papers were besieged.

The man cried, *"Herald? Tribune? Sun? World?* Which do you want?"

"All!" he said, "all!" and grasped them with a prayer.

## CHAPTER XXVI

Success! The headlines leapt from the sheet. "Biggest Kind of a Hit at the Hawthorne: M'Crea Discovers a New English Dramatist." The journal shook in his clutch. "Enthusiastic Plaudits by a Delighted Multitude." God bless America! One after another he read the morning criticisms while the steamer floated closer to the quay, and often he had to pause because the columns swam together.

He could ask Meenie to leave the stage and to come back to him! He could give her all she needed, more than she would relinquish; already eight pounds a week was insignificant to his view. He would go to her to-day if she were in New York—directly he had seen M'Crea. He realised that the papers should show him whether she was acting here now, and he rustled the *Herald* impetuously. The light, unfamiliar type of the advertisements was blurred for a moment and he distinguished nothing. Then he perceived that the theatres published no complete list of the players; few of them mentioned more than their

star. So he could gain no information from the page! he was disappointed. The next instant her name flashed out to him in capital letters. "Meenie Weston—Watteau Theatre—Last Nights of *The Lady and The Lilac.*" His heart missed a beat.

He looked long at the name which had all at once so strange an air. Then she must be well known now—she had sprung into prominence? there could hardly be another "Meenie Weston" on the stage. His excitement sank a little; a breath of misgiving cooled his joy. In his reveries her circumstances had remained the same, and the revolution confused him; his mind would not adjust itself immediately to the unforeseen.

From the bustle of the custom-house he stood aloof; his portmanteau lay a while unclaimed. Then he noticed it and produced his keys, and saw the chalk flourished. His belongings were hoisted to a cab, and he was bumped over the cobbled roads towards the hotel that had been recommended to him.

The fare required was staggering even in his abstraction. A high, wide window, descending almost to the pavement, imparted to the exterior of the hotel the aspect of a shop in which they exposed for sale nothing but chairs and men's legs. As he turned from the desk, his elevation

to such expenditure seemed a shade incredible to him; and the first lift that he had entered in a country where they understand that a lift is intended to save time, though they waste time by the name they give it, shot him to a room in which he could order everything, from a sherry-cobbler to a fire-engine, by pressing buttons.

It was only ten o'clock. Though he was impatient to obtain a verbal account of the production, it would be futile to present himself at the theatre so early. In his eagerness on the boat he had swallowed nothing this morning but a cup of tea, and he awoke to the fact that he was extremely hungry. He went down to the dining-room, and had a breakfast such as he had never seen in England, and drank far better coffee than he had ever tasted at breakfast in France.

In the hall he bought a cigar, and picked up a periodical that lay there. Her name startled his eyes again: "The 'Meenie Weston'! We introduce a very striking trimmed velvet hat, a creation from our own workroom. Simple, but a simplicity with a most attractive effect." . . . And once more: "The 'Meenie Weston' Belt; made of grey suède, white calf patent leather, and black seal. Gilt buckles. 50 cents each, worth $1.25." . . . Yes, his wife had become well known!

He put the periodical down, and sauntered out into the street. Misgiving blew bleakly in him now. These things meant popularity; they meant public adulation. What if she were unwilling to come back to him? It seemed to him suddenly that he had very little to offer her. She must be paid a large salary, admired, flattered—possibly loved! The colour left his face. She had touched her apex—the apex of the musical comedy stage—and she was alone; he had neglected her. Supposing——? No, no, by Heaven! he knew her too thoroughly to tremble for that. But there might be another man she liked—one to whom she would have wished to go; she might be chafing at the tie that hindered her. And the man—the man? the man would be strong only to oppose her virtue. Oh, he knew well what the man would say! he heard himself described in her lover's appeals—a husband who had never valued her, who had left her to temptation with a shrug, a cad who was unworthy of her remembrance. A furious hatred of the unknown man assailed him, a longing to grip him by the throat and feel him writhe.

A hoarding displayed her to him abruptly; a vast poster from which she smiled on the world. He stood and stared at it. Though it told him nothing of the woman's thoughts, the sight of the

actress's gaiety was painful to him. She laughed through a lilac-bush, her arms bearing down the boughs. The poster was a sky of vivid blue, the flowering shrub, and Meenie.

Presently he inquired of a policeman—fat, florid, arrogant, twirling his staff—in which direction the Hawthorne Theatre lay. The policeman said sharply, "How's that?" and when the question was repeated, added with a scowl, "Through the park."

Lingham strolled on. He came to no park, and it did not occur to him to associate the term with a square that he saw. In perplexity at last he ventured to apply to a business-man evidently in a hurry. The business-man in a hurry offered to turn back and conduct him to where he wished to go. Information sufficed, however, and in a few minutes he had reached the house. He went to the box-office, and, when he mentioned his name, was told that M'Crea was on the stage. Would he go round, or should the clerk let the manager know that he was there? He answered that he would "go round."

His card brought M'Crea to the door effusively, a gaunt, loosely clothed man of middle-age, with twinkling eyes.

"My dear sir, I am pleased to meet you!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't you come last night?

You have missed a treat, Mr. Lingham. You have seen the notices? The piece went with a bang; I congratulate you. We have got a fortune here. There is a call this morning for just a few points; come right in!"

He led the way through a passage. The company had already assembled, and Lingham found himself presented, not undramatically:

"Ladies and gentlemen—the author of the piece!"

There was general surprise and gratification; the principal members came forward with extended hands and felicitated him on his success. The leading lady told him her part was "just lovely"; and everybody demanded the reason he had not come last night, the name of the boat by which he had crossed, and what he thought of America.

"Will you go in front, Mr. Lingham," said M'Crea, "or will you remain here?"

"I think I'll go in front," said Lingham; and the prompter showed him through the pass door.

The manager pulled some typewritten memoranda from his pocket briskly:

"We will run through Act One," he said. "There are several points that dragged in Act One. See here, this thing has got to go like clockwork!"

The rehearsal began; and alone in the auditorium, viewing the bare, ill-lighted stage, Lingham saw the characters of his creation simulated by men and women who resembled them not at all. His emotion was deep disappointment. In vain he reminded himself that they were not dressed for the parts, that they weren't made up; he could not feel that the power of clothes, and paint, and false hair was strong enough to endow even one of them with any likeness to his mental pictures. But their acting worked wonders. Gradually he lost sight of the fact that these were strangers pretending to be Angela and her companions—he began to accept their own statements. That was said just as the Angela of his heart had said it! That was just what Angela would have done! Interest succeeded disillusion; he leant forward eagerly; he was charmed—he wanted to clap his hands. Then, on a sudden, all his pleasure was swallowed in amazement: they were speaking the lines that he had sacrificed, the lines of the two pages that he had cut out.

"No, no!" he cried involuntarily.

"How's that?" said M'Crea, looking down. "One moment, ladies and gentlemen! What is wrong, Mr. Lingham?"

"That scene isn't in," stammered Lingham,

rising. The company all pausing for his correction, the sound of his voice dominating the theatre, disconcerted him, "That scene is not played."

"It was played last night," replied M'Crea, "and it seemed pretty healthy then. With your permission, we will let it go at that?"

Lingham murmured confusedly, and sat down again. He listened bewildered. He had destroyed the pages with his own hands; by what magic did they come here? In the manuscript that he had forwarded they did not exist. In only two manuscripts had they ever existed. From one he had torn them; the other—the knowledge rushed through him—the other had belonged to Meenie!

To Meenie! Only Meenie had had this scene. . . . But how could M'Crea have known that she had it? Even if she had rejoiced to hear that the piece was to be produced, why should she have written to him to say that she had a copy? . . . Yet she had done something of the kind—it was plain, luminous. Then she must care a little still? It was proof she wasn't indifferent.

He ceased to attend to the rehearsal; he was engrossed by conjecture. When he was joined by M'Crea at last, he complimented him on the

stage-management and blurted his perplexity in a breath.

"Mr. M'Crea," he said, "I have nothing against that scene—on the contrary, it was a favourite scene of mine—I cut it out simply because I was afraid it was in the way. But I did cut it out. I never sent it to you, and it wasn't in the novel. If you have no objection to telling me, I should very much like to hear how you got it."

"What's the matter with the scene, anyway?" returned the manager. "You are the first author I ever struck who had his knife into one of his own scenes."

Lingham looked at him doubtfully. "Will you answer another question, then? Did Miss Meenie Weston come to any of the rehearsals?"

"She did not," said M'Crea, "never one."

"You know her?"

"'Know her'? Well, all N'York knows her —as an artist. Meenie Weston has been as fortunate on this side as one of our American belles has lately been on yours: she had no position to speak of at home, and in N'York she became the rage. Yes, *sir,* I know Meenie Weston, and a sweet, good, honest little woman she is; take it from her manager! If you are keen on seeing her performance, I shall be pleased to accom-

modate you at the Watteau any evening before we close."

"Oh, the Watteau is yours too, is it?" said Lingham. "I didn't know. Well, never mind the ticket at present, thanks; will you tell me where she is staying? I want to call."

M'Crea scribbled on an envelope. "You will do me the justice to inform Miss Weston that I gave you the *ad*dress at your request, and to repeat our conversation?" he said. "Will you lunch, Mr. Lingham? No? Well, shake!"

Lingham grasped his hand, and they made their way together to the street. Here the route was indicated to the nearest station of the Elevated Railway. He strode on excitedly; activity was a delight. The mildness of the Indian summer was past, but the rigour of the winter had not begun, and the clear, keen air was inspiriting. In his new mood, the city, in its crystal atmosphere, compelled exhilaration. The Londoner noted how definite, how clean-cut were all the objects that met his view, how truly one saw everything for once. And everything seized his attention. The splashes of bright colour made by the fruit-stalls at occasional corners; the public platforms on which men reclined in elaborate chairs while a negro polished their boots with a strip of flannel; even the perfect fashion in which the

women wore the pink roses in their coats—not at all in the English style, not much like the French —every detail was arresting. Broadway was a narrow stream of traffic, and in perspective the roofs of the swiftly gliding cars looked like white parasols floating in a line. He mounted the steps of the station; and, in a train that flew past first-floor windows, sat trying to mask his growing excitement, and to look habituated, while his every glance betrayed him a stranger ill at ease.

Meenie's address was an hotel at the corner of 72nd Street and Lexington Avenue. He inquired nervously if she was in.

"I guess not," said the clerk; "what name shall I say?"

"Say her—say 'Mr. Lingham,' " he answered. "Stop, I'll send up my card." And he wrote on it, "May I see you?"

While he waited, his agitation increased. He wondered if, after all, he hadn't argued too much from her interest in the piece; wondered why he had dared to suppose that she would make the sacrifice that he had come to ask. A page relieved the tension; she was at home. The urchin led him to a lift, and across a landing, and rapped at a door.

Her voice said: "Come in."

She was standing. Her face was very pale,

and there was no smile in her eyes. His impression was of an older woman than he had expected to see; the interval had robbed her of her girlishness.

"Meenie!" he said. . . . "I—it was good of you to let me come up. I—I arrived this morning; I've been hoping you were here."

She did not speak. He held his hat awkwardly, and there was a moment's pause. He was conscious that she had acquired an air of wealth, of fashion; it added to his constraint. He put the hat aside, and moved towards her with slow steps.

"Won't you say something?" he asked. "Are you sorry I've come?"

"I was surprised," she said quietly; "I had no idea you were in America."

"I came over for the production, but the boat was late. So you have got on, eh? More than we ever thought about! You deserved it."

"Thank you," she said. "I was glad to read of the success of your play. . . . Won't you sit down?"

"I have just found out you were generous enough to take an interest in it," he murmured. Her brows contracted sharply, and her eyelids fell. "I can't tell you what that meant to me! I . . . words sound very stupid sometimes—I'm

grateful." He was standing before her still, and now he drew close to her. "I was coming to you anyhow; and when I found you hadn't forgotten me, I thought—I fancied—— Meenie, I've been sorry every day since you went! I've missed you horribly; I was a fool, a beast; I've been ashamed. . . . Is it absurd to ask if you can forgive me?"

"What I had to forgive," she replied, looking at the floor, "I forgave long ago. . . . We separated because we wished it; there's no need for either you or me to be ashamed."

"You mean," he said, "you mean that you're content?"

"I mean that what we did was wise." She met his gaze. "We have known it all the time."

"*I* haven't known it," he cried; "you may have known it—not I! After you had gone I hated myself; I saw how much I cared for you. It's difficult to speak—to beg you to trust me again is to beg you to give up so much now—but I love you. I made M'Crea tell me where you were; I hoped to persuade you to come back to me."

"I am sorry; I was afraid, when I saw your name, that you had come for that. I hoped you wouldn't say it."

"Your position is so dear to you?" he muttered blankly. "Or can't you forget how I behaved?"

"No," she said, "my position is not so dear to me; but I understand too well. . . . I tried to prevent all this. I was glad to be of use, because —because I remembered all the hopes we had had together, but I never meant you to know what I'd done; if M'Crea had kept his promise to me, you wouldn't have known. You say you love me —perhaps even for an hour you think it—but your first word was the right one. You are 'grateful,' and that's all."

"What—what is it," queried Lingham, "that you think I'm grateful for?"

"Oh," she exclaimed, "don't sham to me! Do you suppose I don't know what has brought you here—do you suppose I've no pride? Do you take me for a child, that you come and talk to me like this? 'Love'? You thought of me as I used to be, you imagined me a foolish girl, wretched without you; you said, 'I owe it all to her, so I must go and make amends'!"

He did not cry out; he made no movement. He stood staring at her dumbly; and she saw that she had divulged the truth to him herself.

At last he said:

"If I owe it all to you, Meenie, I'm glad. I didn't know it, though, believe me! I only came because I loved you. . . . Tell me what you did."

"It was I who first showed the piece to him,"

she faltered. "He liked it. And then I told him who you were, and that he mustn't mention me. . . . That was why he wrote about the book —he couldn't say that he had read the play." She turned from him trembling; tears were in his eyes.

"I wish I had been worthier," he whispered.

"It was nothing," said the woman.

There was silence. When he could trust his voice:

"I only came because I loved you," he repeated. "It meant *you* to me from the beginning; from the first moment I thought of you and hoped. When I read the notices I was mad to find you. Then I learnt what you had become, and I was afraid. At the rehearsal there was a scene that I hadn't sent. I knew that you had had it. But that was all, on my honour, it was all! . . Meenie, I wanted success, because I wanted *you;* it's no good to me without you. You've given me the success—won't you give me your love again? I'll do my best to deserve you; I swear I will! . . . Will you come back to me?"

He waited, because she couldn't speak. Her face was still averted, but he saw the throbbing in her neck. Her hand sought his blindly. She drew it close to her, and held it to her heart.

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